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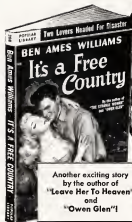
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STARTLING STORIES

Vol. 23, No. 1

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

March, 1951



A Complete Novel

THE STARMEN OF LLYRDIS

BY LEIGH BRACKETT

Michael Trehearne sensed his difference from other men, but didn't know he was a changeling of the only race able to conquer the stars! 9

Two Complete Novelets

- EARTHMEN NO MORE**.....Edmond Hamilton 76
When Curt Newton and the Futuremen revived John Carey from his deep freeze, he wanted to go home—but where in space was home?
- THE TWO SHADOWS**.....William F. Temple 106
A poet, a pragmatist and a girl—they were all that was left of humanity after Earth became a second Sun!

Short Stories

- THEN FLY OUR GREETINGS**.....Margaret St. Clair 95
Science discovers the secret of mutual repulsion
- MEN OF THE TEN BOOKS**.....Jack Vance 122
The folk on the strange planet spoke the language of Earth
- SHORT ORDER**.....Sam Merwin, Jr. 135
Enoch Jones had been everywhere—but was always in the same spot

Features

- THE ETHER VIBRATES**.....The Editor 6
A science fiction department featuring "Ethergrams" from our readers
- CURRENT FAN PUBLICATIONS**.....A Review 153
- SCIENCE FICTION BOOKSHELF**.....A Department 157
- LOOKING AHEAD**.....Coming Features 161

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WE think it high time that we teed off on the almost omnipresent theory of "survival of the fittest." Ever since the publication, approximately a century ago, of the late Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* this phrase, and the supposedly pragmatic idea behind it, have persistently infiltrated Western thought and writing.

By the very nature of subjects frequently dealt with—alien invasion, conquest, colonization and social intercourse among denizens of other star systems and dimensions—it occurs in science fiction probably more often than in other fields of what is sometimes laughingly termed literature. Increasingly, of recent months and years, the goal of survival for its own sake is being employed as justifiable motivation for the behavior of heroes and villains alike.

Darwin Gets the Blame

And Darwin gets the blame—although actually neither the phrase nor the thought were his. You will no more find either in any of his writings than you will find "Heaven helps those that help themselves" in the Bible—another wide-spread misconception.

Who uttered the latter phrase we do not know—but guilt for the "survival of the fittest" can be laid squarely upon the headstone of Herhert Spencer, the man who sought to tailor through rationalization Darwin's theories to fit the ruthless individualism of the nineteenth century industrial revolution. Unfortunately Spencer succeeded so well that we now associate the words with Darwin.

Actually Darwin was a scientist, a man who assembled enormous amounts of data and from such facts made certain inferences logically unassailable. He did not attempt to fit the ages-long evolutionary process he recorded into the day-to-day existence of his contemporaries. In fact his latter-day conclusion was quite the reverse of

Spencer's—that survival seems more likely to go to those species that practised co-operation than those who make competition the keynote of their culture.

It does not take any vast intellectual insight to discover that the thought behind "survival of the fittest" has virtually no relation to fact. Biology and paleontology are awash with examples that disprove it.

Take the Dodo

For one there is the saber-tooth tiger, largest and most efficient of all cats, a species whose powers of adjustment and survival are provable in living room and alley as well as in the jungle. The saber-tooth, for reasons still relatively obscure, disappeared save for museum reconstructions millions of years ago.

On the other hand there is the dodo—probably the most helpless and useless creature, except when browned nicely on a spit, ever to turn up on the biological records. It couldn't run, it couldn't fight, it couldn't fly. It couldn't even sing for its supper. Yet it managed to survive in its antipodean habitat until it fell prey to the empty dinner pails of numerous hungry mariners—within the memory of living man.

For further example take the bald eagle—our symbolic national bird. Certainly this super-hawk, tireless in the air, keen of vision and magnificently equipped with beak and talons, ought to be a survival standout. Yet it is in great and immediate danger of vanishing from the scene forever. On the other hand the chihuahua and the pekinese survive and thrive.

No, the factors that govern survival of species and therefore of the individual are not only complex but have a way of eradicating the strong with the weak. In fact at times these factors seem to delight in

(Continued on Page 139)



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AFTER TWO DAYS' HUNTING IN THE NORTH WOODS, IT LOOKS LIKE STEVE AND BILL HAVE FOUND THEIR BUCK, BUT THEN...



BY GOSH, HE'S TAME AS A DOG!

WONDER WHAT THAT TAG SAYS



IT SAYS: I'M 'BOBBY HOPKINS' PET DEER, PLEASE TAKE ME HOME

WONDER WHERE HE LIVES



THIS IS A MIRACLE! BOBBY HAD GIVEN UP HOPE OF FINDING HIM

WE'LL LIFT HIM INTO THE TRUCK

WE'D BETTER GO ALONG AND SEE THAT HE DOESN'T JUMP OUT



DEER WON'T BE MOVIN' MUCH TILL LATE AFTERNOON. WHY NOT KNOCK OFF AND HAVE A BITE WITH US?

I'M SOLD. SUPPOSE WE COULD CLEAN UP A BIT, TOO?



YOU'RE IN FOR A SLICK SHAVE, STEVE. THIS THIN GILLETTE SURE SKIMS 'EM OFF QUICK AND EASY!

I ALWAYS USE THEM. THEY'RE PLENTY KEN



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IF YOU'RE SURE WE WON'T BE CROWDING YOU

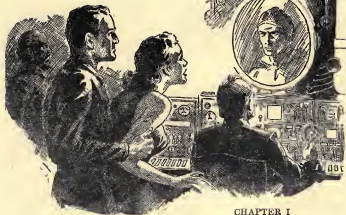
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THE STARMEN OF LLYRDIS



CHAPTER I

Shairn

A Novel
by LEIGH BRACKETT

MICHAEL TREHEARNE was to remember that evening as the end of the world, for him. The end of his familiar life in a familiar Earth, the first glimmering vision of the in-

Michael Trehearne sensed his difference from other men, but he little knew he was a changeling of the only race able to conquer the stars!

credible. It began with the man who spoke to him on the heights behind St. Malo by the light of the Midsummer Fires.

There was a great crowd of tourists there, come to watch the old Boston festival of the sacred bonfire. Trehearne was among them but not of them. He stood alone—he was always alone. He was thinking that the ritual being performed in the wide space of stony turf was just too quaint to be endured and wondering why he had bothered with it, when someone spoke to him with casual intimacy.

"In four days we shall be free of all this, going home. A good thought, isn't it? Two years is a long time."

Trehearne turned his head and looked into a face so like his own that he was startled.

The resemblance was that of a strong racial stamp rather than any blood kinship. If two Mohawks had met in the hills of Afghanistan they would have recognized each other and it was the same with Trehearne and the stranger.

There was the same arrogant bone-structure, the odd and striking beauty of form and color that seemed to have no root in any race of Earth, the long yellow eyes, slightly tilted, flecked with sparks of greenish fire. And there was the same pride. In Trehearne it was a lonely bitter thing. The stranger bore his like a banner.

During the moment in which Trehearne stared amazed the stranger remarked, "I don't remember seeing you on the last ship. How long have you been here?"

"Since yesterday," answered Trehearne and knew as he formed the words that they were not the ones expected of him. A wild throb of excite-



Trehearne said softly, "Shaim," and she came to him, radiant



"Your family—my family. Forgive me if I seem impertinent but it's important to me. I've come a long way, from America to Cornwall and now to Britain, trying to trace down my own line." He paused, looking again into that remarkable face that watched him, darkly handsome, darkly mocking in the firelight. "Will you tell me your name?"

"Kerrel," said the man slowly. "I beg your pardon, *Monsieur*. The resemblance is indeed striking. I mistook you for one of my kin."

Trehearne was frowning. "Kerrel?" he repeated and shook his head. "My people were called Cahusac before they went into Cornwall."

"There was doubtless a connection," said Kerrel easily. He pointed abruptly to the open space beyond. "Look—they begin the final ritual."

The great bonfire had hurred low. The

ment ran through him. He said impulsively, "Look here, you've mistaken me for someone else but I'm glad you did!" In his eagerness he all but clutched the man's arm. "I must talk to you."

Something in the stranger's expression had altered. His eyes were now both wary and startled. "Upon what subject?"

A Monopoly of Speed

ONE of the major problems that currently face the writer of science fiction stories and may some day confront our scientists is the matter of exceeding the speed of light. Many theories have been suggested—perhaps all of them as absurd as that early nineteenth-century prognosticator who forecast human inability to survive in a railway carriage moving faster than thirty miles per hour.

Miss Brackett, in her very fine novel, has a new suggestion as to how man may travel faster than 180,000 miles per second. Such a monopoly as she conceives is hardly an attractive idea—but in view of human history it is all too manlike. And certainly the thought of star travel, in the here and now, is one of the most exciting within the range of human imagination.—THE EDITOR.

peasants and the fisherfolk, some hundreds of them, were gathered in a circle around the windy glow of the flames. A white-bearded old man began to pray in the craggy Breton Gaelic.

TREHEARNE barely turned his head. His mind was full of the stranger and of all the things that had oppressed and worried and driven him since childhood, the nagging little mysteries about himself to which now, perhaps, he would find the key.

He glanced away only a second, following the gesture of Kerrel's arm. But when he looked back, Kerrel was gone.

Trehearne took half a dozen aimless steps, searching for the man, but he had melted away into the darkness and the crowd. Trehearne stopped, feeling cold and furious.

His temper, long the bane of a rather luckless existence, reared up and bared its claws. He had always been childishy sensitive to insults. If he could have got his hands on the contemptuous Kerrel he would have thrashed him. He turned again to the festival, controlling himself as he had learned painfully to do, realizing that he was being ridiculous. But his face, so like that of the vanished stranger, had the look of an angry Apollyon.

The Bretons had begun the procession around the waning fire. Short burly men in bright jackets and broad-brimmed hats, sturdy women in aprons and long skirts, their improbable starched coifs fluttering with ribbons and lace. Sabots clumped heavily on the stony ground.

They would march three times sunward, circling the embers, and then solemnly, each pick up a pebble and as solemnly cast it into the coals. Then they would scramble for the charred brands and bear them home to be charms against fever and lightning and the murrain until the next Midsummer Eve.

It struck Trehearne that most of them, except the very old, looked painfully self-conscious about it all. In a thoroughly bad humor, Trehearne was on the point of leaving. And then he

saw the girl.

She was standing some ten feet away from him in the forefront of the crowd, which had shaped itself into a semi-circle. She had wanted him to see her. She was swinging a white handbag like a lazy pendulum on a long strap and her gaze was fixed on him. She was smiling. Her smile was a challenge.

In the reflection of the great bed of glowing embers, Trehearne saw that she was another of Kerrel's breed—and his own, whatever it might be. But it was not that recognition that made his heart leap up. It was herself.

The red-gold light danced over her, and perhaps it was only that faëry glow that made her seem more than a handsome girl in a white dress. Only a trick of wind and starlight, perhaps, that made Trehearne see in her a changeling, bright, beautiful, wicked and wise—and no more human than Lilith.

She had attracted not only his attention but that of the Bretons also. The ritual circle was broken and they were staring at her and muttering. Then the old man who had prayed went toward her. In his seamed weathered face, in his eyes, was the spark of an ancient hatred, the shadow of an ancient fear.

The girl flung up her dark head and laughed but Trehearne did not feel like laughing.

The old man cursed her.

Trehearne knew not one word of Gaelic but he did not need a knowledge of the tongue. Nor did he need to have explained the gesture of angry dismissal. The Bretons, the old ones, had already picked up their stones for the fire. In another minute they would use them on the girl.

Trehearne strode across the front of the crowd and caught her roughly by the arm, pulling her away. She was still laughing, still mocking as she shouted something at the old man. The words she spoke might have been Gaelic but they had a different sound and they had no kindness in them.

The sightseers parted readily as Trehearne thrust through them with the girl. The voice of the old man followed

them down the slope of the hill and the curious tourists stared after them until they were out of sight.

Trehearne dropped her arm then and demanded, "What was the matter with them?"

"The peasant folk have long memories. They don't understand what it is they remember, only that evil things once happened to them because of us."

"What sort of evil things?"

"Have there been any new ones since the beginning?" Her voice held a dry humor.

They were far from the crowd now, near the beach. A late moon was rising but the walled island city bulked huge and dark, a medieval shadow. The girl was a white wraith, all astrid with the salt wind that tumbled her dark hair and set her skirts to rippling. He thought her eyes were sea-green but in the moonlight he could not be sure.

"Are you going to vanish like Kerrel?" he asked.

She laughed. "Kerrel is a rude man. I offered myself to make amends."

"What do they call you?"

"Shairn."

"That doesn't sound Breton."

"Doesn't it? My other name is unpronounceable and means *of the Silver Tower*."

HER eyes were very bright in the moonlight. He thought that in some secret way she was mocking him but he did not care. He said, "I'll stick to Shairn."

They went on down the path to the beach and sat on the soft warm sand. He told her his own name and she asked, "You are American?"

"Fourth generation."

"From Brittany to Cornwall to America," she murmured musingly. "Oh, yea, I heard all that you told Kerrel. The years, the generations, the mingling of other strains—and still the Vardda blood breeds true!"

He repeated the word *Vardda* wonderingly.

"An old tribal name. You've never heard it." She laughed with pure de-

light. "You're incredible, Michael. No wonder Kerrel made a mistake!"

After a moment of silence, she asked, "What sort of a man are you, Michael? What do you do? How do you live?"

He looked at her keenly. "Do you really want to know? All right, I'll tell you. I'm a man who has never been satisfied. I've never had a woman or a job I could stay with very long. I'm a flier by trade but even that seems a dull and rather childish business. And why? Because I'm too good for any of it."

He laughed, not without a certain cruel humor. "Don't ask me in what way I'm too good. I seem to be unusually healthy but that's important only to me. My brain-power has never set the world on fire. I have no tendency to genius. Yet somehow I've always felt there's something lacking either in me or the world."

Shairn nodded, absently smoothing a patch of sand with her palm. Again he was conscious of a queer wisdom in her that did not fit her youth. She smiled, a small thing full of secrets.

"And you thought that if you learned the origin of your blood you would understand yourself?"

"Perhaps. My father was a weedy little man with red hair. He swore I was none of his. I didn't look like my mother's side either. I've never looked like anybody until I met you and Kerrel. Oddness becomes very wearing, especially when you don't know why you should be odd."

He added, "The villagers in Cornwall called me changeling. I had the same thought when I saw you."

"So we are of one race, Michael, could you stay with me?"

"You're not a woman, you're a witch. I've never met a witch before."

She laughed outright at that. "Nonsense. Witch, changeling—these are words for fools and peasants."

"Who are the Vardda, Shairn?"

She shook her head. "I told you—it is a tribal name. One that I want you to forget."

She went on, "You said to Kerrel that you had come to Brittany to trace down

your family?"

"Yes. I learned in Cornwall that they came from a place called Keregnac."

He thought she started a little at that name but she said nothing and he asked, "Do you know the town?"

"It is not a town," she answered slowly. "Only a tiny village, lying on the edge of a great moor. Yes, I know Keregnac." She picked up a bit of driftwood and began to draw idle patterns in the sand. "I don't think you will learn much there. The village is very old and now almost dead."

He started to speak but she went on, almost hurriedly, "Don't go any farther in your search, Michael. It will bring you nothing but regret. I know the blood you spring from. I am telling you the truth."

She turned to him. "Go home. Go back to America. Be content that you are young and strong and, yes—very handsome, even if you do not resemble anyone else! I have done an ill thing. I should not have spoken to you tonight. Kerrel was wise and his act was kind. Now I ask you to forget me and all I have said. I am leaving St. Malo in the morning."

"No!" He caught her wrist and held it. "Oh, no! You've started this. You can't run away from it now."

"But," she said reasonably, "there's no way you can stop me."

"Then I'll follow." His grip softened, shifted to the place where her strong white neck curved so smoothly into a perfect shoulder. "Please, Shairn. Let me see you again. Let me come with you, to your home."

She would not meet his eyes. She smiled a little and said, "That would be a very long journey indeed."

"Brittany is not so large."

"Have I said that I live in Brittany?" She stood up suddenly. "I must go, Michael. Be angry with me if you will but believe in what I say—forget me, forget Brittany, forget your family. Go home and be content!" Her eyes were full of tears.

She left him then, going swiftly across the moonlit beach, and he would

not run after her. He stood where he was, upset and angered by her sudden going.

After a while he thought of the things she had said and the thing that Kerrel had said. "Have I said that I live in Brittany?"

Where was home to the Vardda?

Bent on the moonlit sand his moody gaze was drawn to the patterns Shairn had traced there. Amidst the aimless rambling lines a word stood out in clear, sharp letters—

KEREGNAC.

CHAPTER II

The Vardda

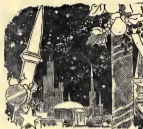
A HIRED car and driver took him for an exorbitant price to Keregnac. On the first day they had roads and made excellent time. On the second the tiny Fiat labored in agony along rutted cart tracks. The sea was far behind them and the driver complained incessantly of the mad desires of Americans. Why should anyone wish to go to Keregnac, a place that even the Bretons had forgotten?

Trehearne was in a savage mood. Shairn's cryptic warnings and her very clear advice had only served to whip his curiosity to fever pitch. The Devil himself could not have made him stop now and he knew that the girl was a large part of that determination.

She had done something to him. She had hit him where no one and nothing had ever touched him before. And she had done it deliberately. He was sure of that. She might be a lot of things, among them deceitful, heartless and dangerous, but she was not feckless nor lacking in intelligence.

Then he remembered her tears and began to wonder all over again.

The driver lost his way among the ruts and the stony hamlets. When he begged directions the peasants regarded Trehearne in dour silence and could not



smoke and age. A meager fire burned on the hearth and two home-made candles furnished all the light.

It was enough to show Trehearne's face.

Oddly enough the squat hard-handed peasant who was master of the house showed neither fear nor hatred. Nor was he surprised.

A certain slyness crept into his sullen

be compelled to answer. It was impossible even to learn whether others had gone this way before them.

Trehearne had foreseen this possibility. He had had enough such difficulties in Cornwall. He had got a map and directions in St. Malo and he forced the unhappy driver on by dead reckoning. It was night before they came wallowing into a muddy square half paved with ancient stones and saw the lights of half a dozen dwellings clustered around it.

"Go there to the largest house," said Trehearne. "Ask if this is Keregnac and tell the master we'll pay well for lodging."

The driver, himself in a thoroughly foul humor by now, did as he was bid and in a few moments Trehearne found himself in a three-room house of crumbling stone, the walls blackened with



"Do you here to go voyaging, Michael?" asked Shain

expression but that was all.

"You shall have the best bed, *Monsieur*," he said in vile French and pointed to a gigantic carved *lit-clos*. "I have also one good horse. The others have gone ahead into the *landes*. You will wish to overtake them."

Trehearne tried to conceal his sudden excitement. "*Monsieur Kerrel and Mademoiselle Shairn?*"

The peasant shrugged. "You know better than I what their names might be. I am not a curious man. I enjoy good health, and am content."

He called sharply in the Breton tongue and a woman came to prepare food. She had a heavy stupid face. She glanced once, sidelong, at Trehearne and after that was careful neither to look at nor speak to him. As soon as the simple meal was on the table she hid herself in the adjoining room.

The ancient crone who sat knitting by the fire was not so cowed. As though age placed her above necessity she kept her bright little eyes fixed upon Trehearne with a mixture of hostility and interest.

"What are you thinking, *ma vieille?*" he asked her, smiling.

She answered, in French that was almost unintelligible to him, "I am thinking, *Monsieur*, that Keregnac is greatly honored by the Devil!"

The man snarled at her in Gaelic, bidding her be silent, but Trehearne shook his head.

"Don't be afraid, *grandmère*. Why do you say that?"

"Every other year he sends his sons and daughters to us. They eat our food, borrow our horses and pay us well. Oh, very well!" Her white coif bobbed. Trehearne laughed.

"And do I appear like the devil's son?"

"You are the very breed."

ON impulse he went to her and said, "Once my family lived here. Their name was Cahusac."

"Cahusac. Eh, eh, Keregnac has forgotten them, the Cahusacs! That was long and long ago. They had an only child, a daughter, who gave herself to

one of these handsome sons of the Evil One and . . ." She looked at him wisely. "But forgive me, my old tongue has not yet learned caution."

Trehearne put silver in her lap and thanked her and went outside. He walked the few paces to the end of the muddy street and looked out upon a moor that stretched still and desolate under the stars.

Into the *landes*, the wastes, Shairn had gone with Kerrel. Why, for what purpose, he could not guess, any more than he could guess the answers to all the other riddles. He knew better than to ask his host. He lighted a cigarette and stood for a long time, staring out across the empty heath, his eyes narrowed and intense with thought.

He had traced his family back to Keregnac and he knew now the reason for their leaving. But the secret of his birthright lay still farther on.

How much farther he did not dream.

At dawn he paid off his driver and his host, mounted the horse that was ready for him and struck out into the moor. He had no idea what direction he should take. However, the moor could not be endless in extent and if he searched long enough he was almost bound to find what he was looking for. If Kerrel and Shairn and other "sons and daughters of the Devil" came into the *landes*, they must have shelter of some kind.

But all that day he rode across stony soil, through gorse and bramble and stunted trees, without seeing a cottage or a solitary sheep or even a distant smoke to mark a human habitation. Only here and there a lonely tor stood like a druid sentinel against a lowering sky.

It drew on to dusk. The wind blew and it began to rain, a fine soaking drizzle that showed promise of going on all night. And the heath stretched on all sides of him, featureless, without comfort or hope.

There was nothing to do but go on. He let the horse find its own way, sitting hunched in the saddle, wet and wolfishly hungry and at odds with the world.

His mood grew blacker as the light failed. The horse continued to plod on through pitch darkness. The land rolled a good bit and Trehearne knew from the cant of the saddle when his mount slid down into the hollow of a fold and then scrambled out again up the other side, slipping and stumbling in the mud and wet gorse.

From the crest of that low rise Trehearne caught a glimmer of light, ahead and to the left.

He said aloud, "There is a cotter's hut," and would not allow himself to hope for anything else. But he spurred his horse on recklessly and his heart was beating fast.

It seemed hours before he reached that light.

He was close onto the place before he could make out its size and shape in the thick night. Then he reined in, completely puzzled. This was no cotter's hut nor was it a manor nor any normal sort of dwelling. He saw a broken shaft of stone that had once been a squat crenellated tower and around its foot a ruin of walls and fallen outbuildings. It was obviously very old, probably the stronghold of some medieval robber, Trehearne guessed.

Yet part of it was inhabited. Yellow lamplight poured from the window embrasures of the keep and there were horses in the courtyard, sheltered under prosaic canvas.

He dismounted and let his weary animal join its fellows. Then, walking quietly over the sunken flags, he approached the tower.

He would have looked inside but the embrasures were set several feet above his head. Instead he stood for a time by the door, listening. He carried a small automatic in his pocket and it felt good under his hand. There was something wrong about all this—very wrong indeed.

The planks of the door were weathered but he thought that they were new in the last thirty years. He could hear the sound of voices beyond, a number of voices all raised in talk, talk punctuated by bursts of laughter.

As he listened there was a glassy crash as though someone had dropped a bottle, then further laughter, in the midst of which a man began to sing in a deep, strong voice. The singer sounded not particularly drunk but very happy. The song and the words to it were both strange to Trehearne. It was a rousing refrain and other voices joined in, one by one.

Instead of reassuring him the jovial uproar only made Trehearne's nerves creep more coldly down his back. He was sure that when he opened the door he would find Shairn and Kerrel among the company. What sort of folk were they, indeed, to hold high wassail in a ruined tower lost on this desolate moor?

The shrill old voice whispered in his memory—*Every other year the Devil sends his sons and daughters.*

He swore and laid his hand on the great iron latch, swinging the door wide open.

The talking, the laughter and the song all died into the silence of astonishment. Trehearne stood still in the doorway and those within remained as they were, as though the opening of the door had stiffened them into figures of wood.

MEN and women, a few less than a score, gathered in an archaic oh-long room of musty stone. Their clothing and the chairs on which they sat did not belong in that room nor in any room Trehearne had ever seen—but they belonged quite naturally to the people. There was a long table laid with food and furnished with bottles of unfamiliar shapes.

Most of the faces were handsome. A few were plain and one was downright ugly. But all of them bore the same racial stamp—the indefinable difference from the rest of humanity that subtly marked Trehearne and Kerrel and the girl.

She was there. Shairn, wearing a loose, short tunic of some strange fabric the color of flame, belted over soft dark trousers. Her belt was jewelled, and her sandal shoes had golden bosses on the straps. She held a purple goblet full of

spicy wine and her eyes were fixed on his and even so he could not read them.

She said without moving or looking away, "If you hurt him, Kerrel, I'll kill you."

Trehearne saw then that Kerrel was taking from his belt a thing that looked like a narrow flashlight with a thick prism where the lens should be. He was dressed like Shairn—they all were, men and women both—except that his tunic was iridescent silver, open to the belt to show his muscular chest.

Kerrel said, "He has a gun."

"He won't use it."

"No," said Trehearne slowly. "I won't use it." His gaze had shifted from the girl to Kerrel. He did not take his hand away from his pocket. Neither did Kerrel put away the prism tube.

The ugly man stepped between them. He had a merry slightly drunken face. From the tone of his voice Trehearne knew that it was he who had begun the singing.

"Nobody's going to use anything," he said and thrust down Kerrel's arm. "We're all friends. We're all happy. We're going home. No quarrels between two Vardda now. Wait till you get to Llyrdis and kill each other there."

He glanced slyly at Shairn and added, "Still at it, eh? My, what fun we do have with our pretty games!"

"Oh, shut up, Edri!" she snapped. "Michael, how did you find us?"

"Yes, Michael," said Kerrel mildly. "Do tell us how." His eyes were not mild, nor the set of his mouth.

Trehearne answered, "I went to Kerregnac on business of my own." He would have gone on but the ugly man called Edri interrupted.

"What's all this about?" he demanded. "Why shouldn't a Vardda find his own?" He came and put his hand on Trehearne's shoulder. "I don't know you, my lad, but what the devil? I can't know everyone. Sit down. Have a drink. Did you miss your ship last time? We have our full quota now but there's always room."

He thrust a glass of the aromatic wine into Trehearne's hand. It went down

like mellow fire and took some of the chill out of his bones. Edri was still talking but he had slipped now, quite naturally, into that unknown tongue—the language of the song, the language Shairn had used when she mocked the Bretons at the festival.

There were others around Trehearne now. They were full of laughter and excitement, deluging him with questions he could not understand. Someone took his wet coat off him. His glass was refilled.

Shairn came up behind him and put her two hands on his shoulders. She spoke to Edri and the others. Their chatter slackened. They stared at Trehearne in amazement. Suddenly Edri flung back his head and roared.

"I don't believe it," he said in English, and peered closely at Trehearne. "You're having a joke together."

Kerrel smiled. "What Shairn says is quite true. Somewhere, far back, this man had a Vardda ancestor. That's his only claim. He's a remarkable staviism, no more."

"Well," said Edri. "Well!" Again he peered at Trehearne, his ugly face puckered comically. His eyes, however, were remarkably cool and shrewd. "He looks like a Vardda," he said.

Trehearne got up. There was a kind of anger in him now. He looked at these people who bore the name of Vardda. He looked at their garments and their furniture, and the taste of their alien wine was strong in his mouth. A shiver ran over him, almost of fear.

He caught Shairn by the arms roughly and said, "Who are you? Why are you here in this place? And where are you going?"

Kerrel answered. "Didn't she tell you? No—I see that she didn't quite dare do that. Well, there's no reason not to tell you now."

He paused. And Trehearne felt a cold foreboding at the hateful satisfaction in Kerrel's eyes. He knew that Kerrel was going to say something that would hit him hard. He suddenly didn't want to hear it.

Kerrel said, "We Vardda aren't of

your Earth at all. We're waiting here for a ship and we're going home to Aldebaran—to the stars!"

CHAPTER III

The Ship from Outside

THE words thundered in Trehearne's ears but they had no meaning—not at first. He let go of Shairn, who whispered, "Do you understand now why I told you to forget the Vardda?"

Edri thrust him into the chair again. "Sit down, old man. It's a large mouthful to swallow all at once. Here—wash it down with this."

Trehearne took the wine and drank it.

Home to Aldebaran. Home to the stars! Instinctively he appealed to Edri. "It isn't true," he said. "It can't be."

"Why not?"

Trehearne's throat was strangely tight. He stammered in his speech, finding it difficult to breathe. "Star-flight? An alien race coming and going on Earth—and all this in secret, no one knows of it?"

Edri laughed. "Oh, billions of people know about it, from Cygnus to Hercules. We Vardda trade openly between the star-worlds of the galaxy for we've an unbreakable monopoly on interstellar flight."

He poured Trehearne's glass full again. "Better let the idea trickle in slowly with the wine."

Trehearne drank mechanically, but the wine was tasteless now. He could not take his eyes from Edri's ugly sympathetic face.

"You mean you've conquered all those stars and worlds?"

Edri snorted. "That's your Earth war-obsession talking. War is not only backward, it's damned unprofitable. We Vardda aren't conquerors, we're merchant-adventurers."

He added patiently, "It's this way—there are hundreds of inhabited star-worlds. They're most of them civilized

and proudly independent. We Vardda rule our own world but no other.

"But we have something the other star-worlds don't have. We've got a monopoly on interstellar travel for certain reasons. We Vardda and we alone can travel and trade between the galaxy's worlds—the richest monopoly of all time!"

"But if you come and go like that, why not openly to Earth?"

Edri shrugged. "You can't trade profitably with worlds still in their war-ridden phase. Such worlds we prefer to visit secretly. Your Earth is one of them."

Shairn broke in. "It's true, Michael! We keep Vardda agents here secretly to gather from Earth whatever of value its civilization produces. We've done that for several centuries."

The blood hammered in Trehearne's temple. *We are waiting for a ship.* If they brought those ships down in these *landes* or in the Great American Desert or in a hundred other of the waste places of the globe, who would know or see them, especially if they landed by night?

And the Vardda themselves—the very truth would protect them. You might look at a man and speculate whether he came from some distant exotic land but you would never suspect him of having come from another star.

A woman began to giggle. "I'm sorry," she gasped. "But his face—it's so funny!"

"And so would yours be," flashed Shairn. Her voice whispered swiftly in Trehearne's ear. "I'm sorry you came, Michael. I truly am. But you've got to hang on now."

He recoiled from the touch of her fingers. His mind was rocking from the terrible agoraphobia of a man of Earth who had suddenly looked through an opened window into the crash and roar and glitter of all the galaxy's stars.

Woman not born of Earth, daughter of the unimaginable deeps beyond the world! Changeling, Likth, star-witch . . .

Trehearne's head reeled and the familiar Earth seemed to vanish behind a

fiery mist that dimmed his vision.

Home to Aldebaran!

He was aware of voices, remote and far away. They were talking, in that unknown language. Kerrel was speaking violently to Edri, Shairn crying out, the others joining in and arguing. Edri drank and did not answer, his brows drawn in a frown.

Shairn's clear voice overruled and silenced the others. She talked swiftly, her green eyes flashing with excitement. The others seemed to agree to her proposal. Kerrel protested angrily but was drowned out. And Edri reluctantly nodded to Shairn.

"Michael, listen!" Shairn's voice came urgently through the haze. "Listen to Edri!"

WITH a great effort Trehearne drew himself back to reality. He looked up dazedly into Edri's ugly compassionate face. Edri said, "You're going with us."

Trehearne stared at him without moving. He did not answer. He could not. For the moment he was beyond words. There was a sickness in him as though the solid ground had dropped suddenly from under him.

Edri went on. He looked uncomfortable, almost guilty, like a man who hates the thing he is forced to do.

"I wish you hadn't come," he said. "But you did and there's no help for it. I'm leader here and under orders. Earth must have no knowledge of the Vardda. You understand? I can't leave you behind."

Trehearne began to understand. He looked at the faces of the Vardda watching him, doubtful and troubled. Only Shairn's face he could not see. He knew they would use force if they had to.

He spoke and his voice sounded hoarse and strange in his ears.

"I'm going with you?" he repeated as though he needed to assure himself of the sense of those words. "Going to Aldebaran."

"I'm sorry," Edri said. "It seems preferable to killing you in cold blood as Kerrel wanted." Abruptly he swore in

his own tongue. "Damn it, I didn't ask you to come here. I said I was sorry. Here. Have a drink."

Trehearne sprang up. He struck aside the cup that Edri held out to him. His violence was born of fear—fear as deep as the abysses between the stars. He was no coward. But no man could have a thing like this flung suddenly in his face and not recoil from it in a kind of horror.

To Aldebaran . . . to the stars . . .

It had a different sound now.

Shairn was beside him, her fingers cutting into his wrist. "Michael, you have to go. I fought for you. I'm counting on you." Her eyes were hard and bright. They challenged him. She whispered, "Don't show them you're afraid!"

The man who stood by the door opened it suddenly and went out, leaving it wide. A curious silence fell on the room. It had an electric quality, a thrill that even Trehearne could feel through the daze of shock that numbed him. They waited and the time seemed endless. He was very cold.

The man thrust his head back in and shouted something, a high excited cry that was echoed from every throat.

"Michael, the ship is coming. Do you hear me?" Shairn's voice, edged, commanding, ruthless. He heard it.

"Walk with your head up, Michael! Don't make them take you by force!"

Trehearne's face tightened. Something dark and cruel came into it. He shook her hand off roughly. He turned and Edri was there, holding out another cup of wine. He smiled, an honest smile, friendly, apologetic. Trehearne took the cup.

It was strange. He saw the others, laughing, shouting, pouring toward the door. He heard and felt. And yet he was like a dead man. Everything was remote, without reality, the flimsy stuff of dreams.

He drank the wine. He knew that he had done so because he put down the cup again and it was empty. He saw Edri watching him and again surprised in that ugly face a look of pity. Then he was walking out with the others.

He stood beside them in the windy darkness of the moor. It had ceased to rain. There was a wide rift in the clouds. The Vardda were looking upward toward it. Trehearne looked also and saw the huge bulk of a great ship dropping silently down from the stars.

Softly, soundless as a drift of the night itself, the star-ship settled down over the heath. There were no noisy jets or clumsy bursts of flame to mark its landing. Trehearne caught the faint and subtle throbbing of motors different from any he had heard before and somehow that quiet song of power was more frightening than thunder.

He watched, alone in his strange dream, alone among all the men of Earth who dreamed, for they would wake and he knew that he would not.

The great sleek powerful stranger came to rest on the moor, bringing with it a dark breath of mystery from the outer Suns. Its hull was scarred by the atmosphere of unnamed worlds and its ports had looked upon infinities where the stars were swallowed up like clouds of fireflies.

Trehearne began to tremble, an inner shuddering of the soul.

The humming of the motors ceased.

CHAPTER IV

Ordeal in Space

THE Vardda began to run toward the ship. And Trehearne was aware that Shairn was pulling him toward it.

He saw that there were two men behind him, holding little prism tubes.

The ship was before him. He had to go into it. He was afraid but fear would do him no good. It was like bailing out. You had to do it and you did it.

He was angry too. But most of all he was numb. Things had happened too fast—too fast and too hugely.

He found himself shaking off Shairn's grip for the second time. He heard himself saying, "I can walk quite well by myself." He was surprised at the tone of his voice. It was sharp as a whiplash and perfectly under control.

A lock-door had opened high in the looming flank of the monster. White light blazed from it. A folding metal stair came down and then men and women descended to join the Vardda waiting eagerly below. There were greetings, talk, laughter. Those who had been exiles on Earth for two years had much to say to the newcomers who would replace them here.

A cargo hatch was open lower down. Vardda crewmen were setting up a conveyor belt with the swiftness of long practice.

Things were being brought to it from the tower. What things, Trehearne neither knew nor cared. Machinery clattered softly.

He had reached the foot of the ladder.

He looked up. The vast alien bulk of the ship was above him. It hung over him like the end of the world and he knew that it was just that. He thought of where that ship was going to take him, out into the darkness between the stars, out to unknown worlds, a stranger.

[Turn page]

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He heard Edri talking to the newcomers. They turned and stared at him, startled. Edri asked them earnestly, "What do you think? Is he Vardda or isn't he?"

A man shook his head. "You'll soon find out."

A woman, looking soberly at Trehearne, said, "It's cruel to find out *that* way. But there's nothing else you can do with him."

Shairn said quickly, "Come on, Michael. Come aboard."

He wondered what the woman had meant. He remembered the look of pity in Edri's eyes, the uncomfortable troubled look of the others.

The treads of the ladder rang hollow under his feet.

A bell inside the great ship began to shrill, sharp and urgent. The freight-belt was already going up. A leonine young man clad in scarlet and black, with the tabs of rank on his shoulders, came running down and bawled a demand that they hurry.

Trehearne said, "Shairn, what did she mean—*It's cruel to find out that way?*"

"Nothing. I'll explain later. Come on."

There was a great emptiness inside him. He was aware of the motions of his body, of the sounds and smells and colors, of the jostling of people behind him on the ladder. And yet none of it was really happening. It did not touch him, it was not part of him.

He trod upon a metal deck and passed from the round lock-chamber into a long transverse corridor faced in the same dull metal. He saw the scars of time and hard use upon it. Now and again through a bulkhead door he caught a glimpse of a cabin or orderly room. Men lived and worked in them. They had a disturbing look of reality.

There was a lounge and there were chairs bolted to the deck and he was sitting in one of the chairs.

The bells rang sharply.

Shairn stooped over Trehearne and whispered, "Kerrel is watching you. He wants to see you break."

They were all watching him, all the

Vardda in the rows of chairs. Their talk had faded away and they were looking at Trehearne uncomfortably, almost guiltily. It was as though something were going to happen to him, something that they didn't want to see happen. Edri's ugly face was bleak and sad.

Trehearne fixed his gaze on the one unfriendly face, on Kerrel's sullen eyes. They gave him a focus, a definite point of thought to cling to. He said over again to himself, *He wants to see me break.*

The bells rang again.

Swift, smooth and awesome as the hand of God, acceleration pressed down upon him. *And this is it*, he thought.

Muttering an all-but-silent thunder the ship rushed upward into the sky. For the first time in history Earthborn ears listened to the banshee scream of atmosphere past a cleaving hull.

The weight on Trehearne's chest seemed as heavy as all Earth but he supported it and breathed and did not black out. His gaze did not waver from Kerrel's.

The wailing shriek rose to a crescendo and died away.

Earth was gone. They had stepped away from it. Even its sky was behind them. He was horribly afraid.

He waited for the pressure to ease. It did not. There was a change now in the pitch of the motor-vibration. It seemed to climb higher and higher in a sort of demoniac frenzy.

Shairn was bending forward, watching him. Her face was tense, without color. All the Vardda were peering at him now in a sort of climax of half-fearful expectation. What was it that they were afraid was going to happen to him?

The pressure grew and grew.

He labored to breathe. Something happened to his vision. The faces around him began to waver and grow vague, to recede slowly into a reddish twilight.

And still the pressure grew.

Fear became near-panic. Something was happening to him—something unearthly and strange. He was a flier, a test-pilot. He had known pressure be-

fore. He had taken all the grays a power-diving plane could bear and he had never come close to blacking out. But this was different.

Speed, he thought. Light-years of speed—a long way between stars!

HE felt it in the fibers, the very atoms of his being. The incredible accelerations of interstellar speed were tearing at the separate cells of his flesh, riving them apart, rending the tissues of physical existence.

He knew that the Vardda still watched him half-fearfully. *This is what they were afraid of. They're used to it but I'm not. I'm going to die.*

He thought he heard a voice saying, "Fight, Michael! Fight!"

"Shairn," he muttered. The word never got beyond his throat. Because a girl in a white dress had beckoned to him he was going to die in an alien ship between the stars.

Kerrel settled back. He began to smile. With almost the last of his sight, Trehearne saw that smile. Kerrel knew that he was going to die. And he was glad.

Kerrel—Shairn—the Vardda—death. Kerrel had known it all along. They all had. That was why the others had looked at him with that half-guilty troubled pity. They had known that he would die.

Pierce resentment blazed up in him like a sudden fire.

Shairn with her lying tears. She must have known it would come to this when she had drawn him to the tower. Yet she had done it, coolly gambling with his life.

Rage shook him. Some buried part of his mind broke free and fury spurred it on. *Why must he die? Why should he not live? The Vardda lived and their blood ran in him.*

Anger—anger such as he had never known. He would not die under Kerrel's smiling eyes. He was filled suddenly with a raging determination to survive. He began to fight the pressure.

He had nothing to fight with but will-power. It seemed a frail thing to pit against the unthinkable powers of veloc-

ities such as the men of Earth had never dreamed possible. Reason told him that but he was beyond reason. He fought and it was a strange inner struggle without sound or motion—a blind battle to regain control of his own flesh.

He fought against the unseen force that sought to destroy the very cohesion of his body cells. Anger flogged him on and the instinctive will to live. He set his muscles and forced himself to breathe and his flagging heart stumbled, steadied and began to beat more evenly.

He did not understand then what happened. He only knew that strength came to him from somewhere, a strength he had never known he possessed. It was physical strength—not the sort that can move great weights but a more subtle kind, a tensile force that strung his body taut against the terrible vibrations of speed and fought them back.

He did not understand, not then. But he caught at that unguessed core of strength within him and drew upon it and it was simple, so simple, just a matter of tensing the muscles in a certain way. Suddenly the ghastly sense of his atoms falling apart was gone and the battle he had thought impossible was won. It was easy and he was strong—strong as any Vardda!

It was then that he came near blacking out from sheer reaction. And he knew the victory had not been easy but very hard. The opening of that buried well of strength had left him paradoxically as weak as a newborn lamb.

Some deep ancestral wisdom told him that he had been newly born in a way that was still beyond his knowledge. He was a different man now. He would never be the same again.

He knew now that this was the important thing his body had been designed for—this proud ability to race between the stars.

Shairn's voice rang out. "He lives! He lives! I told you he was true Vardda!"

Kerrel's face had gone slack with amazement. Trehearne, drunk suddenly with a heady exultation, glanced at him with fiercely mocking eyes. The other

Vardda had relaxed as though from a sick taut apprehension. They grinned approvingly at Trehearne.

But Edri, mopping his damp brow, said between his teeth, "By God, Shairn, if your tricks had made me an executioner, if he'd died . . ."

Kerrel interrupted furiously. "Perhaps he'll wish he had when we reach Llyrdis! You know Vardda law!"

Trehearne heard and recognized the menace in the angry threat but he paid no attention.

He said softly, "Shairn."

She came to him. She was radiant. She was like nothing he had ever seen before and he would never get her out of his heart if he lived forever. He got up and set his hands on her shoulders and he asked her, "Shairn, what is meant by *true Vardda*? How do they differ from other men?"

She laughed. "You have just proved your birthright, Michael. Don't you know?"

"That inner strength," he said slowly. "The ability to withstand interstellar speeds?" She nodded. She was still smiling. He went on. "I want to understand this, Shairn. Do the Vardda alone have this ability?"

Edri had arisen. He had the look of a man who wishes to avoid an ugly situation. He said uneasily, "There's a lot I want to show you, Trehearne. Come on and I'll explain about the Vardda on the way."

"No."

Shairn said, "It's quite simple, Michael. Controlled hereditary mutation, altering slightly the form and structure of the body cells so that they have enormous resistance to pressure and vibration. The other races of the galaxy are tied by their human weakness to their own solar systems—only the Vardda have the freedom of the stars!"

"Then," said Trehearne, "if the mutation had not bred true in me I would have died."

Edri spoke again but Trehearne did not hear him. He was smiling at Shairn, a peculiar smile. She began to draw

away from him but he held her and asked, "Are you glad I lived, Shairn?"

"Of course I am! From the first minute I saw you, Michael, I was sure you were one of us."

"That was very clever of you. And you were so sure you weren't afraid to gamble on it—with my life."

She said uncertainly, "Michael . . ."

His hands moved swiftly from her shoulders. Her throat was warm and strong. The veins beat hard against his palms. He could not see her clearly, only her great startled eyes.

Edri snapped, "Sit down, Kerrel!" He drew a small prism tube from his belt. To Trehearne he said, "I don't blame you one damn bit. But I'm afraid you'll have to stop it all the same."

A pale beam sprang out from the prism. It touched with exquisite care against Trehearne's temple. He sighed once and fell.

CHAPTER V

To Aldebaran

TREHEARNE looked up from the bunk where he lay and asked, "How long have I slept?"

"Nearly twenty-four hours by Earth reckoning," Edri answered. "You needed it. The ship's doctor gave you a shot to make sure."

"I seem to remember," Trehearne said, "that you gave me a shot of some kind yourself."

"No hard feelings?"

Trehearne smiled briefly. "Under the circumstances—no." He sat up. They were alone in a small neat cabin. Edri was sprawled in a chair.

He leaned over and offered Trehearne a prosaic pack of American cigarettes. "Smoke?"

Trehearne took one and lit it. He sat for some time in silence, remembering. He remembered most clearly Kerrel's angry threat. He asked, "What did Kerrel mean by Vardda law? What will they

do with me when we reach Llyrdia?"

Edri looked worried. "I wish to Heaven I knew."

"What can they do? I'm a Vardda. I've proved it."

"Ye-es," Edri agreed dubiously. "Actually, you're all Vardda, a complete atavism. But legally—"

He began again. "You see, the law Kerrel referred to is a prohibition against admitting non-Vardda strains of any kind. Cross-breeding is forbidden under penalty of death, is the one unbreakable law. Keeping the Vardda blood pure isn't just pride, it's an economic necessity."

"Then that was true about the mutation?"

Edri nodded. "It's the foundation upon which the Vardda monopoly is built. No one else can fly at interstellar speeds and live, so we are the only species of Galactic Man, holding the stars in our two hands."

"A star-flight monopoly of the galaxy, built on a simple mutation in body-cells!"

"Yes," said Edri. "Simple—but fundamental. Tissues having a certain cellular structure possess a tensile strength in their cell-walls that can withstand incredible acceleration-pressure without collapse. You're lucky that the mutation was a recessive that finally bred true in you."

He paused, then added somberly, "Some day I'll tell you the story of Orthis, who long ago found the secret of the mutation. A grand proud story it is—with a most shameful ending."

He seemed to brood upon some thought of his own, before continuing. "So, Trehearne, though actually Vardda, you're legally not one. It will be up to the Council. I have no influence there but Shairn has some."

Trehearne said bitterly, "Much help I'll get from that damned witch who was gambling with my life without telling me."

Edri grinned. "I don't say you haven't reason for resentment. Still, don't forget that if Shairn hadn't proposed that ordeal for you, Kerrel would have in-

sisted on killing you in cold blood."

He lifted the cover off a tray on a small table by the bunk. "I brought you some breakfast."

It occurred to Trehearne that he had not eaten for two days. He got up, looking for his clothes. They were gone but others were laid across the foot of the bunk—a tunic of dark green silk, dark trousers, jewelled belt and sandals. He examined them doubtfully.

"Put them on," said Edri. "You can't go about in those ridiculous tweeds."

Trehearne dressed and sat down. The food was unfamiliar but palatable. Synthetic, he guessed. He wolfed it down.

He tried not to think. He knew that if he thought of Michael Trehearne, bound out across the universe toward an unknown fate, his mind would crack. It could not accept that, not yet.

Edri said, "If you're finished, come with me. I'll show you something nobody of your world has ever seen before."

Trehearne got up. He caught a glimpse of himself in a reflecting surface and was startled to see how changed he was in the Vardda dress.

They went out into the long corridor. Edri led the way forward. Now that the ship was in free space and making its unthinkable speed Trehearne could feel the deep inner vibration of power in it—a sort of humming drone that seemed to challenge the whole universe to make it stop.

Trehearne shivered with the joy of a man who has handled power and is privileged to see the ultimate. He had flown the fastest jets and they were like children's toys compared to this mightiness.

He cried, "What is the motive power? And the principle? And how can you go faster than light? The limiting speed, contraction, mass . . ."

EDRI laughed. "One at a time! And such simple little questions too! It took thousands of years to evolve a technology capable of answering them and you want me to explain it all in a few words. Well, a few words is all I know

about it. I'm a drinker by profession, not a scientist.

"A really functional ship, whether it plies water, air or space, must get its motive power by reacting against the element it travels in. And so, right now, the big atomic-powered generators in the stern are producing fifth-order rays which react against the fabric of space itself—and space, not wishing to be torn apart, obligingly thrusts us forward.

"As to limiting speeds, long ago the Vardda physicists believed absolutely in them too—until they discovered fifth-order rays. They found then, as your scientists will find, that the theoretical absolutes you set up from limited knowledge will prove illusory when your knowledge expands. I could explain all that to you if I knew continuum-mechanics better than I do!"

They had reached the forward end of the corridor. There was a narrow circular stairway leading upward. Edri motioned Trehearne to precede him.

He did so and emerged into a round observation dome of immensely heavy quartzite. Through it there was nothing to be seen but utter darkness, streaked with creeping lines of light.

"Those are stars," said Edri. "Or rather the radiation patterns of stars. At our present velocity we are overtaking the lines of luminous energy they have left behind them. Star-tracks, we call them."

He closed a switch, and the thick quartzite became suffused with a pallid, milky glow. Edri consulted a master-dial, and made adjustments.

"Watch the dome," he said. "It's triple thickness, of a special molecular composition, each plane laid at a different oblique angle. I've switched high-frequency electronic current into hair-line grids between the three planes and all sorts of interesting and complicated things are happening in the molecular structure of the quartzite."

Trehearne watched. His heart was beating hard.

"Behold," said Edri, "the light-impulses of the star-tracks are caught,

stepped up, wrenched about and finally held on the inner lens."

Trehearne beheld and, beholding, forgot Edri and the ship and himself. He forgot almost to breathe.

Edri's voice came to him softly. "You may see this often, Trehearne—but never again for the first time."

Trehearne looked into the dark and splendid loneliness of space. The ship seemed to fall away beneath him, leaving him suspended in the plunging gulfs of infinity.

Through the magic of that quartzite dome he watched the great suns march in flame and thunder on their way, some solitary hunters, others joined together in companies of stars. He saw their cosmic pageant of life and death—the young suns, blazing with a blue-white strength, the golden suns, the old red suns, the dead suns, dark with funeral ash.

He glimpsed the far-off island universes, the coiling fires of the nebulae, the wondrous terrifying nations of the Milky Way streaming along the rim of creation. And as he looked all thought and feeling went from him, leaving him naked and dumb with awe.

Some of the stars he recognized—Algol, beating like a bloody heart of fire, the splintered glory of Sirius. To his left Orion strode gigantic across infinity, girded with suns. Dead ahead, tipping the far-flung Hyades, Aldebaran burned in sullen splendor.

How long Trehearne stood there wondering he had no idea. He was lost, a man gone astray in a titan's dream. Edri was forced at last to drag him bodily away and even then he hardly knew where he was going or why.

He found himself in the corridor outside the lounge. From within came the sound of Shairn's voice raised in laughter and the easy murmur of talk.

Edri stopped. He said quietly, "You'll be spending much of your time with the others and the sooner they get used to you, the better. I want no trouble over Shairn. Is that understood?"

Trehearne smiled. His head was ringing with stars, his vision dazzled by the

blaze of nebulae. Shairn had ceased to matter very much. He said so and Edri gave him a wry glance.

"The longer you feel that way, the longer you'll stay out of trouble." He paused and added, "Perhaps you ought to know why Shairn was among us observers on Earth. She went with Kerrel. He's mad over her and talked her into it—though she soon was bored with him and with Earth too."

"I think I understand why you're telling me, Edri," said Trehearne, nodding. "Thanks."

He went on into the lounge. Shairn was curled in a chair beside Kerrel, a wine-glass in her hand. She looked up as Trehearne came in, her eyes challenging and half amused. Kerrel's dark face tightened and suddenly everyone had stopped talking.

Trehearne followed Edri past them without turning his head. He was perfectly sincere in his indifference, too full of that outer immensity to care what a woman thought or did. He sat down, only vaguely aware of the curious glances with which the Vardda watched. Shairn lifted her glass mockingly to Edri. "A good beginning for a happy voyage!"

Trehearne did not look up at her. He sat still, thinking his own far thoughts. Someone laughed and Shairn's green eyes flashed angrily.

But neither her anger nor her mockery could distract Trehearne from the wonder that had caught him, from the wild thrill of this plunge into infinity. And in the time that followed, its grip upon him strengthened.

At first there were periods when he felt that he was dreaming, that the ship and all within it would disappear and he would waken. But as his mind readjusted itself, shaking free from the narrow horizons of Earth, ancestral pride and ancestral longing began to stir. All the ill-fitting craggy corners of his personality, that had jarred so harshly against the world he knew, fell into place perfectly now.

He was of one blood with these

Vardda. He knew it as he came to know them better. They had the same full-blooded joy in living hard, the same storming recklessness and delight in danger, that he knew was in himself. They were Galactic Men—the men who alone voyaged the interstellar gulfs, who alone strode between the stars.

The power, the magnificence of this voyaging between the suns! No wonder the little ships and little skies of Earth had seemed so futile. This was his heritage, the freedom of the stars, the long, long endless roads of outer space, the swift ships plying between the island continents of suns, the windless, timeless, boundless gulf that washed the shores of a galaxy.

Trehearne stood for hours in the observation dome. He haunted the bridge, watching the intricate controls, the staggering complexities of astrogration. In the generator rooms he learned by heart the pulse of the ship, listening to the silence of free flight after acceleration was complete. He learned much and yet it was nothing and he was mad for learning, mad to hold under his own hands one of these proud giants of the stars.

And the Vardda saw and understood his hunger and warmed to him. They accepted him, these gusty eager folk whose pride was as great as their cosmic horizons. He learned the Vardda tongue from Edri and his head spun to the tales he heard then from these mariners of the galaxy, of peril in far-off clusters of suns, of lonely dead stars booming forever dark through darkness with their frozen worlds, of tricky routes through nebulae, of all the thrill and danger that was life to them.

Within Trehearne there grew an iron determination not to be robbed of his newfound birthright. The threat of that hung over him like a black cloud. Having found them, to be barred now from the Vardda ships, the Vardda life, would be worse than dying.

With that determination in mind he began to question Edri about Vardda law.

"Final decision on your case will lie

with the Council," Edri told him. "And they'll be dead against admitting you to Vardda status."

"But damn it, I'm one of you!" Trehearne said. "They can't deny that after the ordeal I passed. And why should one more Vardda make a difference?"

Edri shook his head. "To recognize an Earthborn man as a Vardda? No—it might inspire vain hopes in all the peoples of the Galaxy who are bitterly envious of our monopoly."

That was something Trehearne hadn't thought of. He thought of it, now. "I suppose the non-Vardda do envy your power of interstellar flight."

"Would you like to be prisoned in your own solar system and have strangers carrying on all your commerce with other stars?" Edri countered.

HE added, "And there's more to it than the economic problem. You're mad over this star-voyaging, Trehearne. I've watched you. Well, do you think other men can't feel the same way? Do you think the young men of all those star-worlds like to see the Vardda starships come and go and know that they can never take that road?"

"I can see how they feel," Trehearne said. "A wonder they haven't found a way to force the Vardda to share the secret of the mutation."

"That secret was lost with Orthis. We haven't it to give if we wanted to," Edri said gloomily. Then he added, "But I'd better shut up, or I'll be accused of Orthis talk myself."

"Orthist?" said Trehearne, and Edri explained.

"Long ago, when Orthis discovered the mutation, he dreamed of giving it to every race. He couldn't see that that would only lead to interstellar rivalries and conflicts. A few Vardda still think the way he did and so are called Orthists."

"But if the mutation secret is lost how can they hope to change things now?"

Edri shrugged. "There are still fools who dream of finding the secret again. They claim that Orthis' lost laboratory

ship, which holds it, might still be found. It's only a useless dream but it makes trouble. And with all that in mind you can see your problem with the Council."

"Altogether," said Trehearne, "it looks like a grim prospect for me."

He got up.

"You might as well know," said Edri. "It won't be easy."

Trehearne went out. He climbed the stair to the observation dome, manipulated the controls and stood there, gazing at the red flare of Aldebaran, lost in brooding thought.

After a time a hand touched his and he turned his head, slowly, for his mind was far away, thinking it was Edri. He saw instead the face of Shairn.

She smiled. "Do you still hate me, Michael?"

The light of the outer suns caught in her eyes, filling them with radiance. Trehearne looked at her, standing slim and tall against infinity, a luminous creature crowned with stars, and he thought again that she was no woman as he knew women.

He said slowly, "I don't know." He thought of how she had tricked and led him, how she had gambled so lightly with his life. "Why did you do it, Shairn?"

"I think," she said, "because I love you or because I could love you."

"Or perhaps because you were only curious?"

"Perhaps." She took his hands and laid them on her white throat, holding them there, pressing them in against the beating veins. "You started this once, Michael. Will you finish it now?"

Her lips were curved and laughing. She was sure of herself, sure of him. Trehearne's eyes narrowed. They were suddenly hot and the starlight flickered in them.

"I ought to," he whispered. "I ought to . . ." He called her a short cruel name and caught her arm as it rose to strike him and then her mouth was under his.

Dead ahead, Aldebaran watched them from out of the darkness of space, the eye of a basilisk, baleful and bright.

CHAPTER VI

Judgment on Llyrdis

THE long arc of deceleration was completed. The great starship was cruising now at planetary speed. Aldebaran had grown from a remote point of fire to a giant sun, terrifyingly near at hand. The small companion was visible only as a faint disc above the upper limb, its bluish light drowned out in the flooding ruddy blaze of the larger star.

The Vardda had crowded up into the observation dome, eager for the first glimpse of home after two long years on Earth. A heavy shield now covered the dome to sunward and in its shadow the returning exiles pressed and chattered.

Trehearne stood among them, listening to their excitement and feeling at a loss in it. Their talk was suddenly the talk of strangers, full of names and references that were meaningless to him, strident with a joy he could not share.

They were coming home but he was homeless—and before him loomed the imagined faces of the Vardda Council, passing judgment.

Shairn tugged at his sleeve. "There!" she cried. "There it is, Michael. *Llyrdis!*"

He followed her pointing hand, squinting against the tawny glare of space, and saw a golden planet wheeling toward them, bright and beautiful, with a trio of circling moons.

He became as excited as the Vardda. He forgot to worry. He could only think that presently he was going to tread the soil of a strange world, warmed by an alien sun, tasting the winds that blew from unknown seas. Tensely now, quivering with eagerness, he watched with the others. And Llyrdis grew.

It seemed about the size of Earth. As the ship swept in upon it Trehearne could make out misty continents and the shadow-forms of oceans, wrapped in a cloud-shot atmosphere that burned red-

gold in Aldebaran's light.

The ship plunged into it as into a bath of fire. Down, rushing down with a long triumphant scream, and in the lower air the clouds rolled and whipped in golden fury where the dark hull clove them.

They swept low over an ocean the color of hammered brass and at length Trehearne saw ahead a low shore and beyond it a rolling verdant plain, girdled with tall mountains, and on that plain the gleaming vastness of a city.

Still dropping, but slowly now in a soundless glide, the ship bore southward of those lifting towers. Here for miles the great docks ran, cradling the giants of the stars. They were close enough for Trehearne to glimpse the ceaseless swarming magnificently-ordered chaos of men and machines in this central focus of a commercial empire that embraced a galaxy. The sheer size of it was stunning.

Edri's voice spoke quietly beside them. "I've just come from Communications. We've been ordered to land in the government dock and you and I are to present ourselves immediately to the Coordinator of the Port."

"Old Joris," said Shairn. "You're in for a bad quarter of an hour, Edri. I'll come with you, of course."

"We'll both come." That was Kerrel. He laid his hand with a light possessiveness on Shairn's arm and smiled over her head at Trehearne. Trehearne shrugged. It crossed his mind that some day, if he were lucky, he would kill Kerrel for nothing more than his way of smiling.

The warning bells rang. Trehearne went below with the others to await the landing. But his mouth was set and the keen edge of wonder was all gone.

Smoothly, softly, the great keel touched down, home again from the edges of the universe.

Trehearne rose. There was much hearty slapping of his shoulders, many assurances and offers of help. He knew they were sincere. He bade them all farewell with a jaunty carelessness that was not sincere in the least and stepped out onto the apron of adamantite con-

crete that edged the dock.

To his right, some distance away, was a huge white building. Edri nodded and Trehearne began to walk toward it. Shairn and Kerrel were behind him.

The roar and clang and thunder of the spaceport engulfed the building, dwarfed it, so that it resembled a lonely island in a monstrous sea. The air was heavy with the reek of oil and metal and strange odors out of a thousand gaping holds. Above, in a golden sky, the clouds were like little nebulae of flame.

There was a bitter taste in Trehearne's mouth, and the palms of his hands were sweating as the white building took them in.

The halls seethed with activity. Bronzed men in the black and scarlet of the Vardda ships, hurrying clerks and orderlies of a breed Trehearne had not before seen, a clamor of voices and the racing pulse of Port Administration. Trehearne caught only a glimpse of it. A lift took them swiftly upward to the highest level.

There was an office there, bare and spacious, with window walls that looked on all four sides across the spaceport. Trehearne thought fleetingly that it was almost like the bridge of a starship, pathetically shackled to the soil.

There were three men in the office.

ONE was hardly more than a boy. He was in charge of what appeared to be a recording device. The second was not much older, a brisk efficient young man who stared at Trehearne with frank curiosity.

The third man dominated the room—a grizzled heavy-shouldered giant who had never been made to occupy an office. The walls cramped him, even such walls as these, because they were bounded by horizons. His large scarred hands rested uneasily on the polished table and his eyes seemed better used to watching stars than men.

He glared at them all impartially, reserving one direct, hard glance for Trehearne. Then he addressed himself to Edri. "I believe you're responsible for bringing this man aboard the ship. Will

you please explain your action?"

Edri explained. His voice was clipped and firm. He finished, "I felt—we all did with the exception of Kerrel—that Trehearne should be given a chance." He laid a particular emphasis on his final words. "He had a right to that chance. He proved himself a Vardda."

"A mongrel, a freak," said Joris impatiently. "An Earthman! You did him no kindness to bring him here, where he doesn't belong. And you, Shairn!" He rounded on the girl. "I didn't ask you to come but since you're here I'll—"

"You won't tell me a thing, Joris," Sbairn interrupted him with the ease born of many quarrels. "I'll tell you. Trehearne is as much a Vardda as you are and I'm going to see that—"

It was Joris' turn to interrupt. "I took orders from your father when I flew his ships but you're not the man he was! And I don't hold this job from you!" He favored both Shairn and Edri with his anger. "What the devil got into you? Don't you know the law? 'No non-Vardda personnel under any circumstances to board any craft designed for interstellar flight.'"

He went on to give them a dressing-down that was a masterpiece. Edri listened with a wooden countenance. Shairn seemed to find it genuinely interesting. When he was finished she said admiringly, "You haven't forgotten how to roar!"

Surprisingly Joris laughed. "No," he said, "no more than you've learned manners." He swung around to the brisk young man who sat at the end of the table, indicating Trehearne with a jerk of the head. "Tell him what's to be done with him."

The young man cleared his throat. In painfully stilted English he said to Trehearne, "You will remain in custody in a suitable place until the Council has had time to decide what disposition . . ."

Trehearne moved forward to the table. He leaned over and looked at the young man with a yellow gaze that stopped the words in his mouth.

"If you're thinking of going to Earth," Trehearne told him in good Vardda,

"you had better learn the language."

He straightened up. He was angry. He was very angry and no longer interested in keeping his temper under control. He faced Joris and said, "The devil with your custody! You have no authority to imprison me."

Joris stared at him. He shook his head irritably as though he thought his ears must be playing him tricks. His bronzed, seamed jowls took on a tinge of red.

Trehearne went on, rather loudly, "Unless he is guilty of a crime no Vardda may be detained by anyone against his will. Have I committed any crime?"

It took Joris some time to recover his voice. When he did it had a sound of thunder. "You're *not* a Vardda!"

"No? Think a minute. What is the one distinguishing quality of a Vardda that marks him as different from all other men?"

"All right, I'll answer that! By some freak or other you managed to survive the flight. But that doesn't change the fact that you're an Earthman, born and bred, and therefore no Vardda!"

Trehearne's eyes had acquired a hard glitter. "Then suppose," he said, "that you imprison me—an Earthman who has crossed the galaxy from Sol to Aldebaran and lived. That'll make quite an uproar, won't it? All the non-Vardda peoples will be mightily interested! So will the Orthist party. I don't doubt they'll spread the news all over the galaxy—the Vardda have admitted that they're not the only ones who can fly interstellar space!"

Joris' brows drew down into a straight gray bar. "What do you know about the Orthist party?"

"Enough to know they could make trouble for you. Either I'm Vardda or I'm not—and if I'm not I could be the start of a whole new movement. The first non-Vardda to fly the stars, the first crack in the monopoly!"

Joris controlled himself with visible effort. He said, "You can be put away so quickly and quietly that no one will ever hear of you."

"Good," said Trehearne. "Put me [Turn page]

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away. Put away all the officers of the ship. Put away all the passengers. Put away all the crew. That's a lot of people to keep quiet."

Shairn broke in on a triumphant note. "Yes, Joris! How do you plan to silence me?"

"And me?" said Edri. He had begun to hope.

Joris looked from one to the other and back again, angry as an old bull but for the moment, baffled.

KERREL said contemptuously, "Orthists! That should be enough to show you, Joris. The man is trying to blackmail you with the threat of treason."

"Yes," said Trehearne, "I am." His voice was suddenly quiet. There was an iron quality about it and about the set of his jaw. He ignored Kerrel. He was speaking straight to Joris, to the man.

"When I made that flight and lived I won my right to the freedom of the stars. Do you understand that? I won my right to fly deep space, between the suns and I'll use any weapons I can get my hands on against the man who tries to keep me from it!"

He was silent then, standing motionless, looking into the old man's eyes. And Joris was silent also. Kerrel laughed but no one heard him.

"By God," said Joris slowly, "I take it back. There can't be any mongrel blood in you. Only a Vardda could have that kind of insolence!"

He swung about and began to pace up and down behind the table. The young man gaped. The boy by the recorder gnawed his thumb and shivered in an ecstasy of excitement. Kerrel came forward, intent on saying something. Shairn gave him such a murderous look of warning that he hesitated and in that moment Joris made up his mind.

He went to the recorder, took out the spool and broke it. He gathered the slack of the boy's tunic into one hand. With the other he reached out and collared the young man. He brought them close together in front of him and glared down into their faces.

"If one word of what you've heard here goes beyond this office," he said distinctly, "you will regret it. Understand?"

They understood and said so. Joris nodded. "Now get out."

They left, the boy reluctantly, the young man with his faith in the eternal rightness of things shattered forever.

Joris said, "I'll talk to Trehearne now."

Kerrel could contain his rage no longer. "What kind of a fool are you, Joris?" he demanded. "Freedom of the stars' be damned! Can't you see he's playing with you?"

"If he is," answered Joris grimly, "he'll pay for it. Meanwhile, I'll be the judge of my wisdom. Dismissed!"

"Come on," said Shairn and took Kerrel's arm. They went out together. Edri paused in the doorway and gave Trehearne a parting grin that meant "Good luck!" Then he too was gone.

The old spaceman and the younger man of Earth stood alone in the sweep of light from the windows. From the eastern quadrant of the port Trehearne saw a great ship rise and clear away, outbound for distant suns.

Joris tilted his head. "Come here."

Trehearne obeyed. Joris' eyes were harsh and keen as an old eagle's, weighing, studying, judging. Trehearne stood erect and waited. He said nothing. There was nothing more to say.

"Vardda blood," Joris muttered to himself. "Unmistakable. And he wants to fly the stars." He asked abruptly, "Were you a foundling?"

"No," said Trehearne. And then, slowly, "But I might just as well have been."

Joris turned away, scowling thoughtfully, his head and shoulders massive against the background of burning sky.

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-three."

"I have an idea. Whether it will work or not I don't know. The Council sits again in five days, at which time I will make my report on you—and since I'm taking you on faith and my judgment you'll have to take me the same way. I'll do my best. Meanwhile, for the sake

of my neck as well as yours, you'll have to go where I tell you and stay there. Is that clear?"

"Yes."

"Good. And Trehearne . . ."

"Yes?"

"If I succeed with the Council—you will fly the stars!"

It was as much a threat as a promise. For the first time, Trehearne smiled.

Thirty minutes later, after a journey in an underground tubecar that left him in complete ignorance of his whereabouts, Trehearne was conducted into a square neat cubicle, comfortable in all respects but none the less a prison cell. The lock of the door clicked behind him and he was alone.

There were no windows. He did not even know whether he was above or below ground. There was neither day nor night nor time.

He paced the narrow floor and ate the food brought to him by a silent dark-faced jailor and tried to sleep. He smoked the last of his hoarded cigarettes and thought of Earth and the distances between the suns. He hoped and hope became gradually a grim despair.

No one came. Shairn had forgotten him, Edri's friendship had been a feeble thing. The trap that Joris had set for him became more obvious with each passing hour. He hated them all. He raged and waited and remembered the old man's words—*You can be put away so quickly and quietly that no one will ever hear of you.*

This was his landing on Llyrdis, the fruit of his journey across the star-shot universe. This was the end of his dream.

He ceased to rage. He only waited and wondered why the messenger of death was so long in coming.

There came a time when he awoke sharply from uneasy sleep to hear the low click of the lock and a soft slurred step on the padded floor, coming toward him.

He sprang up, reaching out to grapple with his killer, and saw that it was Shairn. She cried out, "*Michael!*" and he stopped, uncertain, and her words came to him with a sound of unreality

like the voices heard through fever.

"It's all over, Michael—and you're free!"

CHAPTER VII

In the Silver Tower

AN hour had gone by and he still could not quite believe it.

He had left the cell behind him and the five eternal days of waiting. He stood on a terrace high above the city. It was night and the burning moons were golden in the sky. The wind from the sea had the clean sting of wine. Around him were the tall fantastic towers bathed in light. Far below the shining web of streets was a pattern of sensual beauty, many-colored, sounding, alive.

Shairn said softly, "Look at it, Michael. It's all yours. You're a Vardda now by order and decree."

"Vardda," he whispered to himself. Vardda, lord of the starways! His hands were tight on the terrace rail and his gaze was far away.

"I had something to do with it, Michael. Aren't you going to thank me?"

He turned. She had put on a flowing thing of white, cunningly draped and spangled over with a diamond frost, so that her bosom and shoulders seemed to rise from sea-foam and there were strange jewels caught in the dark masses of her hair. He started to speak and then forgot the words. There were better ways of thanking her.

He had not nearly finished when sounds from inside the apartment—it was Edri's—announced the arrival of Joris, and Shairn pulled away from him, laughing.

"Come now and hear how the miracle was done. But you'll have to find a different way of thanking Joris!"

Joris greeted Trehearne with a demand to know what he had been thinking those five days in the cell. Trehearne grinned. "I won't tell you since none of

it was true."

Edri said, "We've told Trehearne nothing." He found glasses and poured wine. Joris settled heavily into a chair, full of an honest pride in his own cleverness, beaming with it.

"It took a lot of juggling," he said, "and more than a little downright forgery—but it worked. A full record of all voyages is kept at Port Administration. I went back between thirty and forty years and managed to supply you with a pretty good background."

He leaned forward: "Get this into your head, Trehearne, and keep it there. You were born on Earth thirty-three years ago of Vardda parents then stationed on that planet. Your mother died in childbirth and your father was forced to abandon you, since even a Vardda infant cannot endure interstellar flight."

He handed Trehearne a slip of paper. "Here are the names of your parents. Memorize them. Your father has since been killed in a wreck off Orion Nebula and you have no brothers or sisters. Incidentally you have no inheritance either, for your 'father's' estate was divided according to law upon his death."

He added, "From now on this is your only history. Don't forget it."

He paused to empty his glass and Shairn took up the story.

"Joris and I persuaded the Councilors not to have you appear for questioning, Michael. The records and your Vardda characteristics were sufficiently convincing. We pointed out to them that the less talk there was about it all the better. They passed their resolution in less than thirty minutes, then followed it by another to tighten the laws against Vardda children being born on any world but Llyrdis!"

She burst into laughter and Trehearne held out his hand to Joris. He said one word. "Thanks."

Joris' grip was hard and horny and his eyes were sharp. "Perhaps I was a fool to do this for you. We'll see. In the meantime you've got to make a living. We Vardda count our wealth in ships—and until you own one you'll have to

work for someone else. Do you still want to fly the stars?"

He saw the look on Trehearne's face and smiled. "I need a supercargo on my ship *Saarga*, outbound in two weeks, for trade in the Hercules Cluster. Officers and crew fly on shares and it's a rich voyage. Even a supercargo should do well."

Edri said, "I ought to warn you, Trehearne—the Hercules run is one of the toughest in the galaxy."

"That's why it pays so well," said Joris. "Well?"

Before Trehearne could answer Shairn laid her hand lazily on his shoulder and remarked, "Nonsense, Joris. He doesn't have to take on anything like that. I can find a better opening in my fleet and he won't starve until I do."

Trehearne's face had tightened. He said, "You never told me much about yourself, Shairn. I gather you're quite well off?"

"Oh, quite! As Joris says our wealth is in ships. He owns two, I own thirty. My father built one of the richest fleets on the trade lanes and I was fortunate enough to be his only heir." She laughed and shook her jewelled head.

"The devil with all talk of business anyway! This is a night for celebration." She pulled him to his feet. "Come on, Michael! We'll show you the city."

"In a minute," he told her curtly. Joris was looking at him with an odd expression.

Trehearne went over to him and said, "When shall I report to the *Saarga*?"

Edri leaned over Shairne's shoulder and whispered audibly, "I think you've got our Michael angry."

Joris looked at Shairn and roared. "Missed your guess, didn't you?" He got up. "All right, Trehearne! Let's see about that celebration!"

They went. But for the next hour or so Shairn was inclined to be sulky. The more so because Trehearne seemed to have forgotten her existence.

RESPLENDENT in black and silver supplied for him out of Edri's wardrobe, free, accepted and with a

future ahead, Trehearne walked the streets of the city, drunk with color and sound and movement.

The city surged magnificently, crowded, thriving, beautiful, devoid of poverty, drenched in the wealth and inventiveness of a thousand far-flung cultures, Mecca for all the peoples of Aldebaran's seven inhabited planets.

The little ships that tramped the narrow planetary roads set down beside the scornful giants of the star-trails and poured into the metropolis a never-ending tide of visitors, come to touch the fringes of a glory they could never touch themselves—to revel in alien pleasures and barter for the gems and spices and spider-woven silks of worlds that they would never see.

Most of them were human or nearly so, their skins of a variety of tints, their costumes outlandish or sober according to their native custom. Some were not human at all.

"See those black-skinned hawk-nosed chaps with the bronze wings?" Edri's hand guided Trehearne's wondering gaze. "They're from Suumis. And the three silvery ones over there with the bright crests and the crimson robes—they're the dominant race on Mirris and proud as Lucifer for all they've got scales instead of skin. That little blue fellow is a merchant-prince from Zaard, the outermost planet. See his diamond caste-mark?"

Trehearne saw. He saw them all and his head swam with it. The pulse and rush of the city, the kaleidoscopic multitudes, the companies of lordly Vardda like peacocks in their jewels and brilliant tunics, the babel of outworld tongues, the drifting sound of music.

From place to place the four of them wandered, drinking the dark wine of Antares, the pungent snow-white brew of Pomalhaut, endless wines of many colors from the worlds of many stars. Shairn forgot to sulk. To Trehearne she seemed to float in moonlight and laughter, bewitching, unattainable.

His head commenced to swim in earnest.

Faces, human, half-human, unhuman,

beautiful, grotesque, ludicrous. Carnival masks, reeling, dancing. Vardda women lovely as sin, dressed in a thousand fashions, smiling with red mouths. Music throbbing, passionate, soft, mingling with the smell of wine and perfume and the sharp sea wind.

Dancing-girls with emerald skins, outlandish beasts that capered with an eerie cleverness, a spinning whirl of pleasure-palaces infinitely strange. Terraces, gardens, parks and squares, nameless trees blowing under the triple moons, Joris flushed and jovial, a grey-pollied ox on holiday, Edri . . .

SOBRIETY was not habitual with Edri but Trehearne had never seen him drunk. He was drunk tonight. And as Joris and Trehearne grew gayer he grew steadily more solemn and withdrawn. He sat drinking silently now, his eyes gazing into inner distances, a brooding look on his ugly face.

They were in a place of trees and crystal columns, with bowers drowned in bloom and the open sky above, when Kerrel joined the party. He sat down between Shairn and Joris, erect, handsome. He did not touch the wine. "Well, Trehearne," he said. "Welcome to the Vardda race."

"Tbanks." And then, deliberately, Shairn moved and laid her head against Trehearne's shoulder.

"Do you have to go voyaging, Michael?" Her lap was full of the great pale moonflowers and her hands toyed with the musky blossoms. Something wicked and demure was in her eyes.

Joris poured ruby liquor into Edri's goblet. "Here, man. You look too sober."

Edri pushed the goblet away. "No. I'm going home. How about the rest of you?"

"But I've just come," said Kerrel easily. He turned to Shairn. "Did you hear about Arrin?"

"What about him?"

"It seems he's one of the Orthist leaders. They caught him today. Odd thing, though—they couldn't find any of his papers." Very casually he added, to Edri, "A friend of yours, isn't he?"

"I know him."

"Oh, come now! You've known him for years."

Edri said nastily, "I've known you for a long time too. Don't cat-and-mouse with me, Kerrel. If you have something to say, say it."

Kerrel shrugged. "I was only thinking that a man can have too many unfortunate friendships." It was perfectly obvious that he included Trehearne among the undesirables.

"Your field is comparative technology," Edri said. "I understand you're quite good at it. Stick to it. I'm leaving."

He walked away, staggering a little. Trehearne watched the solitary figure moving down an avenue of trees, splashed with shadows and golden light. He hesitated, then got to his feet and followed.

Edri stopped when he felt Trehearne's hand touch him. He looked at him curiously as though he had never seen him before.

"What's wrong, Edri?"

"Nothing. A man is going to be punished but that's not wrong. It's right that he should be punished. He is an Orthist, a traitor."

Trehearne understood now. "Your friend Arrin?"

"Yes—my friend. But he deserves punishment for being an Orthist. And do you know how they punish such traitors? With exile—bitter lifelong exile on the lonely world of a lonely star. They are never allowed to fly space again. To a Vardda that's worse than death!"

TREHEARNE felt a trifle sick. He, who had just won the right to star-flight, could realize the crushing enormity of such a sentence.

"I didn't know they did that to Orthists."

"Oh, yes. Not all of them, not the talkers in the salons who only play at it. But the men who work—oh, yes!"

Edri went on. He was very drunk and now that he had started it seemed that he could not stop. He was not talking to Trehearne but to himself, to the wind

and the casual moons and a world that had turned bitter around him.

"Arrin worked. He searched the records, the forbidden files, until they caught him. He never found what he was looking for but he might have—a little more time and he might have!"

He looked up into the sky, the empty sky that stretched to the rim of the galaxy.

"Somewhere out there Orthist sits in his ship and waits—waits to be found again. But where? That's it, the question that no one has answered in a thousand years. Where?"

He turned aside and was abruptly, violently sick. Trehearne waited.

After awhile Edri said, "Curious, the things a man will say when he's drunk."

"I don't know," Trehearne said. "I didn't hear anything."

Edri managed a grin. "I'm all right now. I'm going on home."

When Trehearne returned to the others Shairn complained sweetly, "You were gone so long, Michael. Was Edri sick?"

"Yes—very. But he's all right now. He went home."

"I think," said Shairn with a dainty yawn, "that I'll go home too. Come along, Michael."

Kerrel turned a dull red and there was sudden murder in his eyes. He said thickly, "Am I to understand—"

"You are to understand anything you wish," Shairn smiled.

Joris came out of his vinous fog and enquired hopefully, "Is there going to be a fight?"

Trehearne asked Kerrel, "Is there?"

They looked into each other's eyes, the direct intimate look of hate. Then Kerrel said softly, "No, not now. It's only a matter of time. But not now, not tonight."

He had mastered himself when he turned to Shairn. "I trust you'll find your new toy amusing."

"I shall—until he begins to act as though he owns me." Her smile became more beautiful, more sweet. "Tell me, Kerrel, now that it's over—did you love me or my thirty ships?"

The angry flush went out of Kerrel's face, leaving it deathly white. He stood for one long moment, then turned without a word and stalked away. His heels left small sharp scars in the turf.

Shairn lifted one exquisite shoulder. "He's tiresome. Oh, well! Come along, Michael."

She took his hand and he went with her. Joris' booming laughter followed them down the avenue of trees.

Trehearne realized only later just how wine-flushed he was. He had no clear memory of how they reached the car—an ultra-streamlined sublimation of a car, powered by humming generators—nor of the drive out from the city. He was suddenly aware of a broad road running along the coast, of the golden sea on one hand, dark mountains on the other. Shairn was at the controls. He hoped she was more sober than he. She was going very fast. The sea wind battered at them, wild and cold.

Shairn stopped the car. "This is my home, Michael. My family has lived here for hundreds of years—here in the Silver Tower."

She led him inside. He tried to see it all clearly but things tended to melt and run together—tapestries, carvings, colors, the loot of many worlds. Shairn went before him, floating, a white foam-wraith.

"Michael."

"Yes?"

They were in a long gallery above the sea. The moonlight lay in great angled blocks along the floor.

"You're a Vardda now—but you're in greater danger than ever. Kerrel will kill you if he can."

"Yes," said Trehearne. "If he can."

"Don't underestimate him, Michael. He can be very deadly."

He drew her to him, not tenderly. "You took good care to make him so. You wanted Kerrel and me to battle it to the death right there, didn't you?"

She laughed. "It would have been exciting."

"Listen to me, Shairn. The next time you try to make trouble, you'll get it—from me."

"Now you're being masterful. And no man is my master!"

He took her face between his two hands and looked down into it. His thumbs bit cruelly into her white cheeks.

"I think you're going to be sorry you ever met me, Shairn," he whispered.

Two weeks later, dressed in the black and scarlet of the Vardda spacemen, Trehearne left Shairn for the starship *Saarga*, outbound for Hercules.

CHAPTER VIII

Under the Cluster Suns

THE *Saarga* was not like the ship that had brought Trehearne from Earth. She was older and shabbier with enormous capacity for cargo and no space at all for passengers. Officers and crew were cramped in quarters functionally reduced to the absolute minimum and there were no such luxuries as lounges and observation domes.

But to Trehearne she was a thing of wondrous beauty. Every dent and scar on her unlovely bulkheads recorded a voyage to a nameless sun. The crammed and odorous vaults of her belly were storehouses of exotic riches, the fruits of unimagined worlds. And he was part of her. He was no longer merely a hungry observer. He belonged.

He worshipped her.

His shipmates discussed Trehearne's curious history—official version—with great interest, asked him questions about Earth, then forgot it. The officers treated him with the affable contempt of the veteran for the amateur, liked him and were patient with his feverish insistence on learning to be a starman. There was little else to do on the long haul out and they taught him much.

They showed him the purring metal giants that drove the ship, the mighty generators powered by almost automatic atomic turbines. They taught him how to read the radar-screen, that functioned not by slow electro-magnetic

waves but by rays, incomprehensible to him, which were far faster than light—another flat contradiction of the Earth theoreticians.

He listened in Communications to Vardda ships talking across the galaxy in thin ghostly converse by the same super-swift rays. He was allowed—and that was like realizing an impossible dream—to hold the controls of the *Saarga* in his hands as it raced through infinity.

Trehearne became especially friendly with Yann, the Second Officer, a cheerful young rakehell who had made nine voyages into the Cluster and had once been stranded for the equivalent of an Earth year on one of its wildest worlds, pinch-hitting for a Vardda factor who had died.

"Wait until we hit that system," he told Trehearne. "I'll show you things you never dreamed of. You want to see real barbarism? They have it there!"

Yann had made a brace of fortunes and gambled them away. He still clung firmly to the belief that some day he would have a ship of his own.

"This trip will do it," he would say and laugh and build vast empires that stretched across the star-clouds of the Milky Way.

He was good company. He was very helpful to Trehearne, instructing him in the diverse arts of starmanship. They got on well.

The great Cluster of Hercules grew from a patch of hazy brilliance, lost in the blaze and crash and thunder of the universe, to a monstrous star-swarm, blinding even through a darkened port—a swirling hive of suns, white, red, yellow, peacock blue and vivid green, booming across the eternal night of space with the rush and roar of a cosmic avalanche, hurtling onward toward some unknown destination, guided by the evil blinking eyes of the Cepheid variables.

The *Saarga* plunged in among the edges of the swarm and Trehearne began to discover why Edri had warned him about the Hercules run.

"All the globular clusters are bad,"

Yann told him. "Omega Centauri—there's another one to break a starman's heart. A strong ship, a strong captain and no imagination—that's what it takes for a voyage like this."

Trehearne was introduced to gravity tides and for the first time in his life he knew what real fear was.

The generators throbbed incessantly. The *Saarga* groaned and shrieked in all her metal bones, moving in erratic bursts of speed and sudden brakings, pitching and swerving as she felt her way in through shoals of suns, fighting the complex changing gravitational fields. Trehearne got the feeling that he was trapped inside an iron football being battered back and forth between the stars.

Yann grinned. "It gets worse as you go farther in."

It did.

Trehearne felt that it was impossible for any ship to live in those mighty cross-currents of gravitation as the suns thickened like swarming bees. But the *Saarga* went doggedly on her way and after a while Trehearne got used to her complaints and violent pitchings.

They stopped first at the single lonely world of a waning star on the fringe of the Cluster—a shadowy place, flooded with the distant glories of other suns but cold and barren and dying. The *Saarga* discharged food and ores, took in payment gems of royal purple, mined out of the grey rock by little men with sorrowful eyes.

The little men looked at the great ship and the men who flew in her, then at the flaming suns that were out of reach. They made their bargain silently and went away. Trehearne was glad when they left that world.

They visited the eerie planet of a variable star, where there was no life at all but a creeping fungus, valuable in the preparation of a medicinal drug. Trehearne, clad in insulating armor against the radiation of that evil sun, went with his shipmates to reap the ugly harvest, sank up to his knees in spongy dust.

They traded with scaly humanoids

under the glare of a blue-white sun. They stripped the worlds of a red giant, leaving gilded trinkets in exchange for rare radioactive minerals. They dealt with life-forms so degraded that there was no semblance of humanity, while the Vardda stood with shock-cannon ready to guard the ship while the bartering went on.

And they touched at systems that had a high degree of civilization, where for the first time Trehearne saw the Vardda factories—vast walled compounds held under treaty, crammed with warehouses in which were gathered the salable goods of a family of planets.

That, he learned, was the universal system wherever trade was openly and regularly carried on—the walled compound and separate landing-field presided over by a Vardda factor, an island fragment of Llyrdis preserved intact amid an alien culture.

Trehearne became accustomed to the open envy of the non-Vardda races. He no longer thought of it except to notice its variation according to cultures—the aboriginals who mixed with it a worshipful fear of the Vardda star-lords, the barbarians who would have killed them except that they were greedy for the luxuries of trade, the more civilized folk who treated them with cold respect and ate out their hearts with envious longing.

He got used to the eternal never-changing question, asked on every world by the old and the young and the large-eyed children—*What is it like to fly among the stars?*

BY the time they reached the system of the green star he was a thorough Vardda.

Yann was full of excitement. "This is the system I told you about, Trehearne—the one where I was factor so long. I got to know the natives like a brother." He laughed and clapped Trehearne on the shoulder. "We make a long stop here and I'll see to it that it isn't dull!"

The *Saarga* set down on a world of emerald heat. Besides the starship the landing-field contained half a dozen battered interplanetary craft, brought out piecemeal by the Vardda and operated by them between the wild planets of the system. The great stockaded factory was one of the largest Trehearne had seen and the strangest.

The "logs" that formed the stockade and made the walls of the warehouses were of crystal, cut from the crystalline forests that covered much of the land. Trehearne thought of them as trees and forests, simply because they had stems and branches, but they were inorganic, the glittering proliferation of sublimated alien chemicals.

They glowed and flashed under the fierce green sun, showing glints of weird color where a prism formation broke the light. And also, in their shining branches, they netted the many-colored rays of the brighter stars that burned even in the daylight sky.

There was a town beyond the factory. It too was built of the crystal logs over foundations of black rock sunk in the

[Turn page]

A TEN-THOUSAND-YEAR INVASION OF EARTH



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ooze. Thick vines clambered everywhere, bearing bulbous fruit. Undergrowth, green almost to blackness, stood rank between the trees. There was a smell of fragrant rotteness, cloying, sweet.

Trehearne moved and sweated through a bath of molten jade. It was a large world and heavy. The gravity dragged at him. The letters of the freight lists swam under his eyes. When he was finished at last with his job he was glad enough to follow Yann.

"Wine, cooled in deep wells," said Yann and smacked his lips. "Make a new man of you."

"A hell of a world," said Trehearne.

"You should see the others of this system. This is the pick of the lot."

They walked through the outer compound, a sort of caravanserai crowded with folk from the other planets, brought in for the trading. Cold-blooded creatures with crimson eyes, opbidian princes of the inner worlds, wrapped in golden mantles against the chill. Slim furred kings of the outer planets, capped and girdled with precious stones, still and panting in the heat. These and others watched the two tall Vardda, thinking their own thoughts.

They passed through the gate out of the factory, wading in soggy mud. The sun was setting in a welter of lurid green, tinged with peacock hues. Trehearne looked at the town ahead, the straggling lanes, the crystal huts that crouched in sordid beauty, the encircling forest of ungodly trees. Doubt assailed him.

"Perhaps we should stay in the factory. There'll be plenty of wine and more comfort."

Yann cursed him good-naturedly. "I told you I know these people better than I know my own children! Come on, Trehearne, there's nothing to do in the factory. Don't you want a good time? I've got friends in the town. You'll like them."

Trehearne glanced back at the factory. It was not inspiring. He shrugged. He was beginning to feel the long confinement of the voyage, the tensions and

the haste of trade. It would be good to cut loose for once, to see something of life outside the compounds, to get a change from the same faces. It was against orders but . . .

He made sure of the prismed shock-tube in his belt and followed Yann.

Night came. The glorious sky of the Cluster crashed down on them, sown to bursting with stars as bright as moons. The crystal trees took on opaline fires. The hut walls glittered.

Around the two Vardda there gathered a crowd of sloe-eyed children, silent and solemn, with hides of dusky green. Women watched them from the doorways. Human enough and pretty enough too, the younger ones, sleek and olive colored, wearing bright silks from Llydis around their hips and baubles in their hair.

Trehearne asked Yann a question that had puzzled him. "How is it that there are humans or humanoids on so many worlds? Earth scientists had the idea that the human form was likely to be unique."

"Oh, the Vardda biologists have been busy with that for centuries. They've compared data from all over the galaxy, and worked out a theory that at some remote time great clouds of spores were deliberately released into space—you know, little life-seeds with a basic tendency to develop toward the human form or something like it. What long-dead civilization tried to perpetuate the human form by releasing the spores we'll never know."

He laughed. "Anyway, who cares? Here they are and mostly human and I take them as they come!"

HE chattered happily as they went along the winding lanes, telling of his multifarious sins and adventurings and the clever ways in which he had cheated the factory. The hostile curious eyes of the women followed them and now and again a man spat expressively into the mud behind them.

They came at last to a hut on the outskirts of the town. Beside it were chained four pairs of beasts the size of

harriers, milk-white with dark muzzles and feet, their undulating bodies built light and long for speed. They made shrill barking sounds and leaped at the strangers, showing hungry fangs. Trehearne thought they looked like gigantic weasels—and quite as friendly.

"Hounds," said Yann. "Kurat is a hunter. I had a private arrangement with him for skins." He winked hugely and lifted up his voice, shouting in the native tongue an obvious demand for Kurat to come out and welcome his brother.

A lean hard-muscled man emerged. He wore a loin-cloth of brilliant blue silk, not very clean, and a necklet of hammered metal. He greeted Yann with glad cries. Trehearne smiled inwardly. They were two of a kind, the Vardda and the hunter, a brace of happy scoundrels.

Kurat welcomed him in the *lingua franca* of the factory towns. A brother of Yann, it seemed, was his brother also. He swept Trehearne before him into the hut.

There was a numerous family inside. A very old man and woman sat in a corner, doing nothing. Babes and children cluttered the floor. Kurat's hulking wife waded imperturbably among them. A handsome younger woman brought in a great sweating jug and poured from it into Trehearne's cup.

The wine was cold and bitter. Trehearne, draining it, began to forget the heat and his weariness. Then, as he looked up into the young woman's face, he was startled by the hatred in her watching eyes.

He said suddenly, "Why do you hate us so?"

She laughed metallically. "Is there any world where the Vardda are loved?"

"Because we are able to fly the stars and you aren't?"

"Because we too could have had the freedom of the stars and you Vardda kept us from it!"

Trehearne stared at her, disconcerted by her sudden passion. "But the secret was lost . . ."

"Oh, yes! And even on this far world

we know how it was lost! All the universe has heard of Orthis, of how the Vardda drove him into the depths of space and destroyed him when he would have shared his knowledge. And so you are free and I am chained and my children after me forever."

She turned abruptly away from him. He looked after her, disturbed and oppressed by the revelation of what bitter depths of hostility lay behind the faces of the non-Vardda.

But Yann shook his shoulder. "Kurat has made a kill today—a rare skin. Come outside and look at it. It's worth money."

LESS from interest than to escape his own oppression Trehearne rose. They went out a back way. There was a shed some distance away, where Kurat said the hide was drying. Yann and he chattered in the unfamiliar jargon. Trehearne was not much interested in the whole business.

It was dark inside the shed. Yann said, "Wait a minute while I make a light."

Trehearne waited but not long. The light exploded inside his own skull. He heard Kurat grunt behind him with the exertion of the blow, then laugh. Yann was laughing too.

Trehearne knew a moment of murderous fury and then the world of the green star slipped away from under him.

When it returned again into his ken, he was sprawled on his face in mud, stripped of his tunic, his jewelled belt, his sandals. The hut of Kurat had vanished, the town with it. He was in the forest, encircled by trees whose crystal branches glittered under the savage stars. His head hurt and he had no weapon.

He got unsteadily to his feet with only one thought in mind—the determination to get his hands on his good friend Yann. He took three steps in no particular direction—and then stopped, bathed in a sudden icy sweat.

In the distance and not too far away he heard the high-pitched cry of Kurat's strange hounds.

CHAPTER IX

The Hunting of Trehearne

IT dawned upon Trehearne then that this was not merely assault and robbery. This was murder. He had walked unsuspecting into a trap, had sat there while Yann and Kurat talked jovially over his head, arranging the details of its springing.

They would not want his body in the hut or in the town. They would not want it to look like murder. They would carry him into the forest, then set the hounds after him and leave the beasts to do the final work. Who could be blamed if a drunken Vardda wandered off where he had no business to be and was pulled down by a pack of hounds?

He wondered if Yann and Kurat were following the hunt.

And why did Yann want him dead?

He began to run.

The rosy vines that crept and clambered among the crystal trees were like nooses set to catch his feet. He fell and rose and ran again and the spongy ground gave treacherously. It was very hot, and he was heavy, heavy with the drag of a heavy world.

Behind him, clear and shrill, came the yap-yap-yaaaahh! of Kurat's weasel hounds, racing over a fresh scent. The crystal branches gleamed and sparkled, tipped with star-fire—sharp-tipped like spears. Trehearne stopped and tried to break one and it was like trying to break a bar of steel with his bare hands. He gave it up and fled onward, not knowing where he was or where he was going, only wanting to stay away from the lithe white demons that pursued him.

There was a little river, black and warm. He waded upstream in it, splashing to his waist, swimming the deeper pools. The bitter wine had left him thirsty and he drank. The water tasted foully of pitch and slime and he spat it out again, gasping.

He heard the voice of the pack change

to a querulous whining as they checked by the bank. He sank down to rest and listened to them casting back and forth. He thought he heard a man's voice shouting but could not be sure.

He went on again, striking into the forest. The great stars were pounding against his head and his body was leaden with many extra pounds of weight by gravitation.

Trehearne prayed for a fallen branch but there was none. He prayed to find the town and that too was denied him. He ran heavily under the glittering trees and behind him the hounds burst suddenly into full cry, more distant now but as chilling to the blood.

It would not be long before they overtook him.

He measured the trees with an eye to climbing one for refuge. They were glassy and badly shaped and they were low. He remembered the long whipcord-bodies of the weasel-like beasts. He thought they could leap as high as they needed to pull him down.

He staggered on and every time he fell it was harder to get up again. The cry of the pack swept closer.

Abruptly, from somewhere ahead of him, came the challenging voices of other hounds.

Trehearne stopped, despairing. He was caught now between two fires. There was no use in going on. He choked on the acrid gorge of fear and cast about for a weapon, something, anything to hold in his hands, to kill with, at least a little before he was torn apart.

It came to him that the yelping of the beasts ahead was stationary and irritable. They were not hunting. They were chained.

Trehearne sobbed. He began to run again.

There was a clearing. He saw it ahead, dimly through the starshine and the trees. He strove to reach it and the pack cry clamored at his heels.

He tripped and pitched headlong and was almost happy because he had fallen over a tangle of branches left from the breaking of the crystal trees. He caught one up. It was not long but it was better

than nothing.

He plunged forward into the edge of the clearing. It was there that the hounds of Kurat bayed him.

Swift and undulant, white as frost in the starlight, they came leaping between the glistening trees. They voiced one final cry of triumph and then were still, still as arrows in mid-flight.

Trehearne set his back against a glassy trunk. Their fangs were like hot irons in his flesh and he was as mad-dened as they.

There was a hut across the clearing. Four of the hunting-beasts were leashed beside it. A man, a woman and a tall boy came out of the hut. The boy started to run toward Trehearne, shouting. The man caught him. He spoke to the boy and made him still. They stood there, watching.

Trehearne swung his broken crystal branch.

ONE he killed and one he crippled. The remaining six hollered around him, a liquid tangle of bodies leaping, flowing, slashing with the white knives of their teeth. The blood ran on Trehearne's body. He swung and swung again and still the man and woman watched stolidly and did not move.

The boy cried out and the man cuffed him.

Trehearne yelled and dropped the branch. One of the hrutes had fastened on his wrist. Its weight dragged him to his knees and he knew that this was the finish, the last of his voyaging amidst the stars. He tore the strong jaws out of his flesh and swung the brute as a flail in the faces of its mates and then he could hold it no longer and the pack closed in.

The boy had slunk back into the shadows by the hut wall. Now, suddenly, he reached and slipped the thongs from around the necks of the tethered hounds.

They tore across the clearing over the jagged stumps and flung themselves upon the pack of Kurat.

For a moment the beasts forgot Trehearne. He scrambled free of the snarling tangle and went toward the hut.

The man rushed by him, howling. He picked up a branch and began to beat the hounds, struggling to separate them. The woman wailed and ran to help him. The boy came to Trehearne.

He was not much above sixteen, tall and well made. He put his arm around Trehearne's waist and took him into the hut and sat him down. Trehearne was glad to sit. The room reeled and darkened around him. When his sight cleared the boy had brought cloths and a pungent salve and was binding his cuts.

"What is your name?" asked Trehearne in the *lingua franca*.

"Torin."

"You saved my life, Torin. I will not forget it."

"I would do anything for the Vardda." Instead of hate there was hero-worship in this non-Vardda face. It was obvious that in the boy's eyes Trehearne was a figure of glory. Trehearne was touched.

Torin stared at him, his task forgotten. And he asked the question, the old unchanging question that was always on the lips of boys. "What is it like—what is it really like, to fly between the stars?"

Trehearne put his hand on the lean young shoulder and lied. "It is long and hard and not nearly as adventurous as hunting. I'll wager that you're as good a hunter as your father."

"Not yet," said Torin. "Some day . . ." He bent to his work again. His fingers moved over Trehearne's flesh, touching the muscles, spreading the wounds, gentle with the thick salve. He scowled, brooding ever some question of his own.

"It feels like mine," he said. "It bleeds like mine and here is an old scar and there will be new ones. It is not a different flesh, made of iron or some other thing."

He sprang up. "Look!" he cried. "I am strong, very strong. See, my flesh is hard like yours. Surely it is not true that only the Vardda can fly in the great ships! Surely I am strong enough to go out and see the stars!"

Trehearne could not meet his eager eyes. He said, "It takes a different kind of strength." He tried to explain and

gave it up. He could only say, "I'm sorry."

He got up. "Will you guide me to the compound, Torin? And think what you would like out of all the things that are there. I can't take my life from you without giving something back—a little gift between friends."

Torin whispered, "I want to see the ship."

Trehearne frowned and in the interval of silence he heard the noises from the clearing—the whining growl of the hounds and a sudden lifting of human voices.

"Torin," he said. "Look out and see who has come."

He flattened himself in the corner behind the door. The boy opened it and peered.

"Two have just come into the clearing," he whispered. "A hunter whose name is Kurat—and a Vardda." He drew back and looked at Trehearne. "They were hunting you?"

Trehearne nodded. His face had tightened and grown cruel. "Give me a knife."

Torin handed him a skinning blade of crystal chipped to a razor edge. Trehearne said, "Go and tell them I am dead from the hounds' tearing. Tell the Vardda to come and help you carry out my body. And see that he comes in first!"

Torin hesitated, then he went. Trehearne heard him calling across the clearing. The gabble of voices increased and Yann's familiar laughter sounded. The boy was talking, telling the details of Trehearne's dying.

Yann strode into the hut.

He came confidently. He had nothing to fear. And then Trehearne's arm was around his throat and the point of the knife was biting in under the angle of the jaw.

"Don't move," said Trehearne. And again, "Don't move!"

Yann stood still.

"Undo your belt and let it drop."

Yann did that very carefully lest Trehearne become nervous. Blood ran down the side of his neck. "You'll cut the

vein," he whispered. "No deeper, please, no deeper!"

The belt dropped. Trehearne set his foot on it. Then he flung Yann from him savagely, so that he fell sprawling on the floor. Torin stood wide-eyed in the doorway, watching.

Trehearne knelt and took the little prised shock-tube swiftly from its sheath on Yann's belt. "Now," he said. He did not take his eyes off Yann. "Keep watch, Torin, and tell me if anyone comes."

"They are busy with the hounds and with talking," the boy said.

YANN sat sullenly on the floor, holding his neck. He glowered at Trehearne but he made no move to rise.

"This wasn't my idea," he said. "I was only doing a job. You don't have to kill me."

"I don't have to but I'd enjoy it. Whose idea was it, Yann?"

"He was going to give me a ship," Yann muttered. "A ship of my own. Any man would do it for a price like that. You'd do it yourself, Trehearne. That's just common sense."

Trehearne said, "Who offered you a ship?"

"Kerrel. You go fight it out with him. I've got nothing against you, Trehearne, it was just a business deal. One life, one ship. You fight it out with Kerrel."

Trehearne kicked him. "You're not worth killing. Get up and get out. And Yann—"

"Yes?"

"Stay away from me!"

"All right, all right! But I don't see that you've so much to complain about." Yann hauled himself upright and started toward the door. "I'm the loser. You're alive, aren't you? And I've lost a ship!"

"That's too bad," said Trehearne. "You and Kurat can go away and mourn about it. And if I were you I would go fast."

Yann glanced back at him. He began to run. Within seconds he and Kurat had leashed what was left of the pack and vanished out of the clearing.

Trehearne watched them go. He was shaking with fury. Already he had forgotten Yann. He was thinking of Kerrel.

"He can be deadly," Shairn had said.

The man and woman returned slowly to the hut. In his hand, by its loose scruff, the man carried a limp dead hound. He flung it down at Torin's feet.

"There's your work," he said. "Two of the others will not hunt for days. We will go hungry because you are a fool."

He did not look at Trehearne. The woman did with stolid indifference. Torin said angrily, "I don't care. I couldn't just stand and watch him die!"

The man growled, "Learn to think of your own and not the Vardda. You will be happier."

Trehearne picked up Yann's fine jewelled belt and tossed it on the table. "That'll pay you for your hound." He went out across the clearing and in a minute Torin joined him, pointing out the path.

"I'm sorry," he said. "My parents are good and kind but they do not understand the Vardda."

"Perhaps they do," said Trehearne. "Better than you know."

It was morning when they reached the compound, a green morning oppressed with heat. Trehearne was ready to drop but Torin strode blithely ahead and all the way he talked of the great ship. He would accept no other gift but that, to see the ship, and he pleaded so that Trehearne had not the heart to refuse him.

After all it was little enough reward for what the boy had done.

It was the last great day of the trading and all the Vardda were inside the compound except one man who guarded the *Saarga*. The hatches were closed. Only the airlock port was open and the guard sat in front of it, yawning in the heat.

He hightened up when Trehearne came. "What happened to you?" he demanded, and laughed. "A big night, eh?"

"I spent it with a pack of hounds," Trehearne answered and spoke to him about Torin.

The guard looked doubtful. "It's

against the rules—the skipper'd have my head if he found out."

"How can he find out? Don't worry, I'll see the boy gets clear of the ship. You can look the other way."

The guard could not withstand Torin's hungry gaze. "Well—all right. Only be sure you get the kid out again fast!"

Trehearne saw to it. He showed Torin what he could, from the bridge to the generator-rooms, and the boy trod softly as though he were in a holy place, touching, sighing, wondering. Trehearne was sorry he had brought him. He felt a pity to see that longing that could never be fulfilled.

He pressed upon Torin what few trinkets from other star-worlds he had in his own cabin and led him out from the ship and stood with the guard, watching the boy go slowly away across the field, looking back, always back, until he was lost behind the compound wall.

"Star-crazy, like all the rest of them," said the guard. "Well, he'll get over it."

"I suppose so," said Trehearne and was glad he would not see Torin again.

He went into the factory, found the doctor and told the captain a brief story of how he had had too much wine in the town and been set upon by stray hounds. The captain remarked that it was no more than he deserved and had him learn thereby the folly of breaking rules. Trehearne slept until he was roared out to check the lading.

Toward midnight the cargo was all aboard and the hatches locked. The *Saarga* lifted into the star-shot sky, and the acceleration huilt and huilt to the thrust of the throbbing generators.

Trehearne was almost asleep again when he heard the screaming.

CHAPTER X

Death Between Stars

THEY found Torin lying beside the well that led up from the hold. He had made it that far. His skin was al-

ready darkened with the subcutaneous hemorrhage, his body twisted and writhing, his face almost unrecognizable. And he screamed and would not stop.

Trehearne held him and watched him die.

It seemed to take a long, long time. It was not a clean death. It was dissolution. Trehearne remembered his own torment and there was nothing he could do.

The others watched also with sick white faces. In the end it was the guard who went to fetch a cloth to wrap the body in and there were tears on his cheeks.

Trehearne laid Torin on the sheet. His flesh was not hard any more. He was no longer straight and well made. He was not even a dead boy. He was a rag, a shapelessness, an obscenity. It crossed Trehearne's mind how nearly he had come to dying that same death.

He got up. He returned to his cabin, stripped and scrubbed himself in a kind of frenzy. He kicked his sodden garments into the corridor for someone else to deal with. He could not touch them again. And all the time he heard Torin's voice crying, "Surely I am strong enough to go out and see the stars!"

They came a little later and told Trehearne that they had found where Torin had hidden himself under the wrappings of a bale, to be carried aboard with the cargo.

"It wasn't your fault," they told him. "There was no way you could have seen the boy."

Trehearne was not comforted.

They buried Torin in deep space, to drift forever among the Suns of Hercules. And Trehearne thought of a but, of a man and a woman who were waiting for their son to come home. He wished that Torin had listened to the wisdom of his father.

The *Searga* tramped her way onward among the worlds of the Cluster. Time and events gave Trehearne other things to think about. He was a starman now, tested and hardened, a functioning part of his environment. His horizons were

boundless and the stars had not lost their lustre. But somehow, even so, the first fine flush of glory was gone.

He remembered the bitterness of the woman who had said, "You are free and I am chained and my children after me forever." He remembered the countless young men who hungered, the eyes of children wide with dreams. Each time he saw the new-healed scars on his body he remembered the boy who had dressed those wounds and found the Vardda flesh no different from his own—a treachery too subtle for his understanding.

Over and over, when he slept, he held Torin in his arms and watched him die.

He told himself that it was all wasted pity. Whatever had been done to Orthis long ago was not his doing. Things were as they were and there was no help for it. He was one of the lucky ones and he should be content with that.

Most of the time he was content. But now and again there would come the small sharp doubts, the creeping sense of guilt.

If only Torin had not come aboard the ship to die!

He needed to talk to Edri. He needed to ease his mind, to get things straight with himself, and he knew that Edri would understand.

He was glad when they started the long haul back to Llyrdia. He discovered that, much as he wanted to see Edri, he wanted even more to see Shairn. He wondered if she had forgotten him by now or if she would be waiting when the *Searga* landed.

The voyage back seemed to take a million years. And Yann was always there, a constant reminder to Trehearne that there was someone else he had to see on Llyrdia.

The *Searga* made her worldfall at last under the tawny-red glare of Aldebaran. Trehearne watched the golden planet rush and grow toward the ship. He cheered with the others at the first sight of home and did not think it odd that he should strain as eagerly as they to see the familiar towers of the city rising out of the mountain-girdled plain.

The freighter found her dock and wallowed into it.

Joris was on hand to watch his ship come in. He had been in contact with the *Saarya* by the ultra-wave radio and now he boarded her before her ports were fairly open. The skipper had given him good news of the venture and he was in jovial spirits, clapping shoulders all around, peering at manifests, firing questions, demanding to know how Trehearne had acquitted himself.

"A good voyage, eh?" he cried. "Well, any voyage through the Cluster is a good one if someone doesn't get killed!"

Trehearne said bitterly, "Someone did."

Joris stared at him, uncomprehending.

"Oh, not one of the crew. A native boy, crazy to fly the stars. He stowed away."

All the light went out of Joris' face, leaving it bleak. It was a long time before he spoke and then it was only to make a routine statement about the ship. He seemed to have lost all his joy in it. Trehearne was surprised at the impact that those few words about a nameless boy had had on the old man.

Joris left soon after. He told Trehearne, "I'll see you in a day or so. Meanwhile I think Shairn is waiting for you at the sector gate." He spoke as though his mind were not really on what he was saying.

He turned away, then hesitated and asked, "How old was that boy, Trehearne?"

"About sixteen."

JORIS nodded. He walked away across the apron as though he carried on his massive shoulders some heavy burden that weighed them down.

Trehearne signed over his manifests to the port official in charge of unloading and went in search of Shairn.

She stood outside the great barred gate, watching for him. She was just as beautiful as he remembered. He caught her in his arms and kissed her and her lips were just as he remembered them.

He said, "You haven't forgotten me then?"

"No. Did you expect me to?"

"I wouldn't have been surprised."

She laughed—the sweet familiar laughter spiced with mockery. "You're a wise man." She cocked her head back and studied him. "You've changed. You've got so brown and hard and—older. I think I like you even better now. But I'll have to learn to know you all over again."

She pulled him toward the long, sleek vehicle that waited. "It will be nice," she said, "this getting acquainted again!"

A broad road took them northward along the coast, away from the clamoring spaceport and the city. Cliffs began to rise from the golden sea, wild and rocky. Trehearne had been this way before and now he saw nothing but Shairn.

She asked suddenly, "Where did you get that?"

His sleeve had fallen back and she was looking at the scars on his wrist.

"Someone set the hounds on me," Trehearne answered indifferently. Then, "By the way, how is Kerrel?"

"I haven't seen him. He's not in the city." She glanced at the scars again. "How did he work it?"

"How did who work what?"

"Oh, stop trying to be subtle! I was pretty sure that Kerrel would arrange something for that voyage. He's not a man who takes his defeats lightly."

Trehearne told her briefly the story of Yann and the bounds. He finished, "I want to see Kerrel."

"You will!" Shairn's eyes sparkled. "And I want to be there when you do!"

The car swung around a curve, where a great crag jutted out from the sea, backed by a mountain wall. On it, seeming as proud and enduring as the rock, was built a tower faced all in silvery metal.

The wind and the spray beat upon it, the wild things of the ocean sky nested at its feet, yet its tall windows looked over the distant city and counted every ship that came and went from the sprawling port. Trehearne had been

here before too. It was Shairn's ancestral home, built by generations of Vardda men and women, reaching out with strong hands to grasp the stars—the Silver Tower which gave her her name.

Inside it was Trehearne who led the way to the long gallery looking to the west, a place of cool pastels that tempered the molten glory of the sea. For a time, with Shairn, he forgot about Kerrel and Torin and all the things that preyed upon his mind. He only knew that it was very good to be here again.

It was evening when he was again reminded of them. They were still sitting in the gallery, sipping the sharp, cold wines, and Shairn said, "Are you happy, Michael?"

He remembered another time when she had asked that question—the night that Edri had walked away alone down the avenue of trees. He remembered Edri crying out in the dark against injustice and instantly the old restlessness was back upon him.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, I'm happy." He turned the wine-glass in his hands, brooding. "Shairn, could you get Edri out here? I'd like to see him."

He felt her stiffen and draw away and he thought that she was angry with him. He went on, "It doesn't have to be now. Tomorrow's time enough. But I—well, I want to talk to him."

"You're fond of Edri, aren't you?"

"He was a good friend to me."

"Yes—and to me." She turned around. "You might as well know now as later. Edri was arrested a month ago."

Trehearne sprang up. "Arrested?"

"Yes. They sentenced him yesterday. Exile to Thuvls—for the rest of his natural life."

CHAPTER XI

Fateful Decision

FOR a moment Trehearne stood still like a man stunned. *Thuvls—for the rest of his natural life!*

"No," he said. "Not Edri. There must be some mistake."

Shairn shook her head. "I wish there were but there isn't. Edri is an Orthist, caught, confessed and convicted. He was unable even to offer a defense."

She turned away from him. "I don't like it either. But Edri knew what he was doing. He brought this on himself."

Trehearne asked, "What happened?"

"You remember that night in the wine garden when Kerrel spoke of a man named Arrin who had been arrested?"

"Yes. He was a friend of Edri's."

"Well, they couldn't find Arrin's papers. They wanted them very badly. It seemed that Arrin had found some clue to the course of Orthist's ship, on that last voyage when it was lost, and had been making calculations."

She paused, then added grimly, "Kerrel got the idea that Edri had those papers."

Trehearne's yellow eyes took on a peculiarly evil glint. "Then Kerrel was at the bottom of this?"

"That's why he retired to his estate for a while. He's not very popular just now. Everybody liked Edri. They don't approve of his ideas but Kerrel went about it in such an underhanded way, setting spies on Edri and digging pits for him to fall into. He's told all over just how cleverly he did it. Now he's got himself appointed as an agent of the Council on the strength of it. Well, he did his duty. Edri had the papers, all right, and more of his own."

Trehearne groaned. "The idealistic fool! Why wasn't he satisfied to be a Vardda himself, without worrying about the rest of the galaxy?"

Shairn seemed relieved. Then, "That's what I said! But knowing your friendship for Edri I was afraid you'd lose your head when you heard."

She went on quickly. "I know you'll have a reckoning with Kerrel over this and your own score. But you'll have to be careful and clever since he's now a Council agent. I can help you—"

But Shairn's voice faded out of Trehearne's hearing, except for that one phrase.

"—knowing your friendship for Edri—"

Yes, Edri had been his friend. He was sorry for Edri. But should he let friendship be a chain to drag him back down from all that he had dreamed and desired and finally achieved?

No! He would not let himself be trapped by friendship and by pity! He had been merely indulging in emotionalism, to sympathize as he had with the non-Vardda peoples' hunger for star-freedom, to remember as he had the hopeless longing in their eyes, to brood as he had over the dying of Torin.

A sick fatal foreboding grew in Trehearne as he realized the decision shaping in his mind. He knew that it was shaped by emotion, not by reason, and he felt a savage contempt for his own weakness.

He spoke, interrupting Shairn. "I'm sorry, Shairn, I was thinking. And I think I've got to try to help Edri."

She stopped, looking at him with wide steady eyes. Then, rapidly, "Michael! Don't be a fool!"

He smiled mirthlessly. "That's what I've been telling myself. But it doesn't work. It seems that I'm determined to be a fool."

"You're taking it too tragically! After all, Edri's not going to be executed."

Remembering Edri's words about the fate of Arrin, Trehearne answered, "I think he'd almost prefer that. Exiled to a remote star, never to fly again, nothing to do but sit and wait for death—no!"

"But there's nothing you can do, Michael! He's convicted, sentenced. They're taking him off tonight. So there's an end to it."

Trehearne rose to his feet. "I'm going back to the city, Chairn."

"For what?"

"I'm going to try to get him away."

SHE understood then the full depth and danger of his thinking. She caught him fiercely by the arm.

"Are you going to throw away everything you've worked so hard to get for [Turn page]



oh-oh, Dry Scalp!

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nothing? Remember, Edri's a traitor. No matter how good a friend he was to both of us he's a traitor and deserves his punishment."

"That's how you feel, is it?"

"Is there any other way I *could* feel? You know what the Orthists are as well as I do."

He said quietly, "I'm not sure I do. Perhaps you'd better tell me."

"They're destroyers. They want to ruin Llyrdis, the Vardda trade, everything as it is now." Her passionate voice took in the star-trails, the swift ships flying, the Vardda pride of race and achievement.

"Orthis had his laboratory in his ship. The secret of the Vardda mutation is there. They want to find that ship. They want to find the secret in it and spread it all across the Galaxy."

"Would it be so terrible," asked Trehearne, "if others should have the ability to fly between the stars?"

She looked at him as though he had spoken blasphemy. He added, "Except, of course, that it would wreck the Vardda monopoly."

"That sounds very strange, coming from you," she said bitterly. "You, the outsider, who fought so hard to be a part of the monopoly. It looked pretty good to you then after thirty-three years of crawling in the mud of Earth!"

"I've seen more of it now. I've seen a boy die because of it. I don't think I like it any longer."

"You don't like it?" Her voice was low and passionate. "*You!* And what do you know about it? *We* earned the right to what we have. *We* were the first—first of all the races of the Galaxy to go into interstellar space.

"And we did it without mutation, without anything! Four generations that first voyage took. Four generations of children born in deep space, in a little ship crawling between the stars! No one else ever did that. No one else ever dared!

"And as for our wicked monopoly—it keeps the peace of the Galaxy. It keeps worlds alive that would have died. It brings wealth and comfort where they

never were before. But you don't like it and so it must be destroyed!"

She stopped for breath and then she whispered, "You make me ashamed that I have loved you!"

She turned from him and went swiftly along the gallery. There was a purpose about the way she did it that made Trehearne uneasy. He followed her and found her at the visiphone. The screen was already brightening.

She looked at him with blazing eyes. "I fought once to get you into Llyrdis. Now I'll undo that mistake!"

HE struck her away from the instrument and closed the switch. She was on him then like a cat, clawing him, calling him mongrel and freak and worse names, raging at his ingratitude. She was hard to hold but he held her and she could reach neither the visiphone nor the bell to call her servants.

He held her, and she laughed her mocking laugh at him. "All right. Go on, then. Go and make a fool of yourself, trying to free Edri. See how far you get. And remember that it's had enough for a Vardda born to betray his people but for you—"

He held her a moment longer, swallowing his own rage, thinking. He could not let her go. The moment he left she would send out the alarm, denounce him to the Council, put an end both to his own freedom and to any remote hope he might have of saving Edri.

It took him only a few seconds to decide. In the mood he was in it was not difficult to strike the necessary carefully-calculated blow.

He carried her out to the car in his arms. If any of the servants were watching it would look very sweet, very romantic, her dark head on his shoulder, her arms around his neck. They would not be able to see that her wrists were tied.

He put her down gently in the padded seat. She did not stir. There was the shadow of a bruise already forming on her chin. He got in beside her and sent the car humming down the wide road that led to the city.

WHEN he was far enough away from the tower he stopped. He bound Shairn securely with strips torn from her own garments, taking especial care with the gag. He arranged her on the floor as comfortably as he could, out of sight. Then he drove on and did not stop again until he reached the spaceport.

The lights were still on in the office of Joris. Probably he would stay late tonight, to oversee the business of taking Edri away in the prison ship. Trehearne felt guilty about Joris, almost as though he were betraying his own father. The old man had been good to him.

Shairn seemed to be safely unconscious. Trehearne left the car where he thought it would be least likely to attract attention and went into the Administration Building. He had only the vague beginnings of a plan in his mind but whatever he did it would have to start here.

The roar and bustle of the spaceport were not diminished by darkness. Some of the Vardda officers he knew. They hailed him as he passed them in the corridors, congratulating him on his voyage, asking him when he was going out again. Trehearne almost faltered then, thinking what a fool he was to give up all this for an idle hope. And then he remembered Edri and went on. Edri had done his best for him when he needed it. It seemed that he could not do less for Edri.

The lift took him up to the high room that was like the bridge of a starship that would never fly. Joris was there. He was quite alone. He had been drinking for some time but he was not drunk. He looked up when Trehearne came in and his eyes were heavy and rimmed with red.

"What do you want?" he said.

"A favor."

"Another time, Trehearne. Get out. Get the hell out."

"Another time won't do." Trehearne leaned over the table. "They're taking Edri out for Thuvis tonight. I want to say goodbye to him, Joris. That's all,

just a word before he goes. Tell me what ship it is and where—or if you can't do that tell me what sector and I'll see him outside the gate."

"That's right," said Joris. "You're a friend of Edri's." He reached for the wine bottle. There was an empty one beside it and another on the floor. "How good a friend, Trehearne? That's what I'd like to know. How good a friend?"

His bloodshot gaze was sharp and very shrewd.

Trehearne said angrily, "You know I'm not mixed up with him. You know where I've been."

"Yes, I know. You've been watching a young boy die in space. What did you think when you saw that, Trehearne? How did you feel?"

"Let's not talk about that," said Trehearne harshly. "Tell me where I can see Edri and when. That isn't much to ask, Joris, just a minute to say goodbye."

"A boy sixteen," whispered Joris, "full of hope, full of longing, proud of his strength. . . . I ought to hate you, Trehearne. You're not even half Vardda in the ordinary way and yet you can fly the stars."

He filled his glass again and emptied it. His hands were steady. He was neither drunk nor maudlin. And yet there were tears in his eyes. Trehearne saw them and was somehow shocked. It did not seem possible that Joris could weep.

"Joris," he said gently, "forget about the boy. Let me see Edri."

Again the red-rimmed leaden gaze locked with his, weighing, measuring. "I like you, Trehearne. So I'll tell you again. Get out. Go away. Forget you ever came here."

Trehearne did not move. Abruptly Joris picked up the empty bottle and flung it, not at him but near him. "Get out, you fool! I'm giving you a chance to go!"

There was nothing to do but obey. Trehearne moved toward the door, thinking angrily that he would have to risk the sector map in Operations. He stretched out his hand to the latch and

the door opened under it fast and he was looking straight into the prism lens of a shock tube, held by a tall spaceport guard. Shairn was beside the guard.

The guard said, "Back up."

Trehearne backed. He looked at Shairn. "I should have clipped you again to make sure."

"You should. I got my feet loose quite easily. This silk is pretty flimsy stuff." She walked past him toward Joris. The guard came in and closed the door, setting his hack against it.

Joris demanded, "What's all this about?"

"I found her out by the gate," the guard said. "She was gagged and her hands were tied."

"Trehearne," said Shairn to Joris. "He's an Orthist. He came here to help Edri escape."

"Did he?" said Joris. "Did he now?" He looked at Trehearne. "You stand where you are. Don't try anything." He reached into a drawer of the table and covered him with the lens of another tube.

"An Orthist, eh?" he said softly. He began to laugh.

CHAPTER XII

The Fight at the Spaceport

SHAIRN sat down on the edge of Joris' table. She smiled at Trehearne and in this moment he hated her. He looked from Joris to the guard and back again and did nothing. There was nothing then that he could do.

"Would you have believed it of him, Joris?" said Shairn. "Would you have thought that he could turn on us after all we did for him?"

Joris leaned back in his chair. "Shairn," he said, "I'm sorry it had to be this way."

"Yes," she answered, and then added bitterly. "Kerrel was right about him, after all."

Joris said, "That isn't what I mean."

Something in his tone made Shairn turn and look at him. He went on. "I'm sorry you got yourself into this. You're only doing what you believe to be right. But so is Trehearne. So am I."

He dropped his bombshell so quietly that for a moment neither Shairn nor Trehearne could quite believe that they had understood him.

Shairn got up off the edge of the table. She backed away, her eyes fixed on Joris in horrified incredulity. "You, Joris! You an Orthist!" Her tone made the words a denial.

But Joris nodded and said, "Yes."

Abruptly, Trehearne laughed. Shairn swung around. "You heard?" she said to the guard. "Arrest Joris!"

The guard shook his head and smiled. "Hardly. I'm Joris' man."

It was Shairn's turn now to stand like a trapped thing, searching for escape and not finding it.

Trehearne said, "May I move now?" His voice was a bit shaky with relief.

Joris grinned. "I didn't want you throwing yourself around. Somebody might have got hurt. Yes, you can move."

Shairn hurst out, "I can't understand this, Joris! You, of all people—it's insane!"

"Perhaps. But I think Trehearne would understand." He scowled at his own hands, brooding, and then he said, "It doesn't matter who knows now. I did the forbidden thing. I married a woman of another world, a non-Vardda. I had a son. He wanted to fly the stars. He used to beg me to take him aboard my ship.

"After all, he was my son, half-Vardda. He thought he could do it. He hid himself away in my cabin and—the Vardda blood had not bred true in him." He glanced briefly at Trehearne. "He was not quite eighteen. I never flew another voyage after that."

He got up, kicking the empty bottle away. "I guess that was why I first gave Trehearne his chance. It seemed to make up in a way for—"

He broke off abruptly. "Well, that's over and done with. We have other

things to think about and not much time to do them in. Trehearne, you've upset my plans rather badly by fetching in Miss Spitfire here."

"It wasn't intentional." He went to Joris. "Is it true then? You're going to get Edri free?"

"I'm going to try. You see, this is a thing I could only do once. I've had to sit here for years, watching more than one good man go out to Thuvia, waiting—waiting for the time when I could make my action really count. Now it's here." He turned and glowered at Shairn. "The main question is—what are we going to do with you?"

She answered him angrily and without fear. "Whatever you do you'll live to regret it!"

"H'm," said Joris. "Tie her up again, Trehearne."

He did so with immense pleasure. This time he used stouter bonds and took extra pains with the knots.

Joris paced up and down, thinking hard. "I hate to say this but there's only one place I know of where there's no danger of her being found before we're gone. And that's aboard the ship."

The guard said, "There won't be any time to get her off again."

"I know it," said Joris grimly. "So it looks as though we'll have an extra passenger."

Trehearne had finished with the gag. He looked at Shairn. Her eyes burned and her face was white above the cloth.

Joris threw his cloak over her. "Take her down in my private lift," he told the guard. "The sector has already been cleared, so you won't have any trouble there. Get her aboard and make damned sure she's locked in."

THE guard nodded. He picked up the cloak-wrapped bundle and put it over his shoulder. The buzzer of the visiphone made a sudden jarring sound. Joris motioned the man to hurry, waited until he was gone before answering. Trehearne pressed himself back against the wall, out of range of the screen.

Kerrel's voice said, "Joris—we're bringing Edri down in exactly fifteen

minutes. Is everything ready?"

Joris nodded. "The sector is cleared, the guards are posted and the ship is ready for take-off."

"Good. There's a good bit of feeling about this business and we don't want any trouble."

"I've seen to it," Joris told him.

The screen went dark. "The swine!" said Joris. "He's only doing what he believes is right but he's so bloody smug about it. Agent of the Council! Bah!"

Unexpectedly he caught Trehearne's shoulders in a bearlike grip that nearly broke them.

"I'm glad you're with us. Are you armed?"

"Yes."

"Come on, then. This is the end of my waiting. I'm going back to space, Trehearne! I'm going to do the things I knew I'd have to do some day after I watched my son die. Come on then—move!"

They went down in the tiny private lift and out of the building to a guarded sector where the lights burned brightly over silent ships, where there were no swarming mobs of non-Vardda workmen, no clatter of machinery and whizzing of busy trams, only the deserted aprons of the great docks and the empty spaces between them.

As they went Joris told Trehearne what he had to do. "Only the guards at the gate, and the four who will pick up Kerrel's men when they come through belong to me. The others, we hope, will be too far away to interfere. But we'll have no time to linger."

"Where is the prison ship?"

"I spotted that at the far end of the sector. And they'll find its generators shot when they try to follow us. The Orthists are strong among the non-Vardda. The mechanics were glad to do that little job for me!"

Joris spoke briefly to the guards about Trehearne. They nodded a welcome. "In about ten minutes," Joris said. "Is the girl aboard?"

"All secure, sir."

"Good. Come along, Trehearne." He led the way past two of the towering

docks. By the time they reached the third they were out of sight and hearing of the gate. In this third dock was a long rakish starship, lightless and silent, all hatches closed except the port.

"The *Mirzim*, the ship we're taking," said Joris. "A long-distance light trader, built for speed. Well, we'll need that. It belongs, by the way, to a good friend of mine. He'll have to collect from the two good cargo-ships I'm leaving behind."

He added, "The crew's waiting inside now. Only a half-crew really—not many navigators and technicians are dependable Orthists."

He stationed Trehearne in the shadows under the corner of the apron. "We'll jump them right here. Try not to kill anyone. As soon as Edri is free make for the *Mirzim*."

"Right." Trehearne settled back into the patch of darkness, hidden from anyone walking past in the areaway. He held his shock tube ready in his hand. Joris was already gone, heading back to the gate.

Trehearne listened to the sounds of the spaceport. The sharp smell of the sea was in the wind, and in the distance he could see the shining towers of the city. He thought that this was probably the last time he would ever see Llyrdis.

He knew a stabbing pang of regret. And then, coming from the direction of the gate, he heard the rhythmic tramp of perhaps a dozen men, moving at a brisk pace toward him. He was glad that the wait was no longer.

He did not move but his body quivered, settling itself.

There was Joris, walking first with Kerrel. There were four men without uniforms. There was a fifth man and beside him Edri, with his right wrist linked to the man's left. There were four more men without uniforms, then four of Joris' guards.

The head of the little column passed the corner of the third dock. The four guards broke rank and pulled out their shock tubes, aiming the pallid beams at an angle to avoid hitting Edri.

Trehearne sprang out and joined them.

Three of Kerrel's men went down on that first assault. Two were unconscious but one could still use his shocker. Joris had caught Kerrel unawares and knocked him down with nothing more than his great hammer of a fist. He pulled out his own weapon then and waded in.

A vicious dogfight began, swirling around with Edri as its center. Edri grappled with his guard and they fell, both struggling, both hampered by the fetters.

BOTH sides quit using the shockers. The fighting was too close for that, a small blundering nasty *mêlée* of fists and feet, men stumbling over each other, hitting the wrong people in their haste, going down, getting up again, shouting for help, swearing, astonished, furious.

Trehearne, trying to get to Edri, smashed one man solidly in the face and sent another staggering. Then he was tripped and was kicked as he went down. He found himself sprawling on top of Edri, who grunted and struck at him, then said, "Oh, it's you. The key is in his belt."

Trehearne chopped down with his fist. The man's head rang on the concrete. He lay still and Trehearne found the key.

A heavy weight descended on him from behind, grinding his face into the cement. The hand that held the key was pinioned in an iron grip. He thrashed about, trying to unseat his attacker and in the meantime Edri had grabbed his hand as well, wrenching and clawing with a single-minded determination to have the key.

He got it. Trehearne managed to get his knees under him and roll. He saw Kerrel's face close to his. In a second the two men had each other by the throat.

They strained together, breast to breast, like two lovers, kicked and trampled by the feet of other men, oblivious. Edri got free and rose. He would have struck Kerrel but Trehearne gasped, "No! I'll handle him!"

Kerrel smiled, an anguished baring of the teeth. His thumbs bit hard into Trehearne's neck.

Trehearne let go of Kerrel's throat. He bunched his two fists together and struck upward. Kerrel's head snapped back. His hands loosened. Trehearne tore them away. He threw himself on top of Kerrel. He hit him hard in the face until Kerrel's head rolled like the head of a dead man.

Hands grasped him and tried to drag him away. He shook them off. Kerrel moaned and turned on his side. Trehearne kicked him with his sandalled feet. "That's for Yann," he grunted. "That's for the hounds and for Torin."

A voice roared at him. "Leave it, damn you! Leave it!" A very strong arm thrust him aside. He recognized Joris. There were distant sounds of shouting, coming closer. Kerrel's men were down or scattered. Their own men were running for the *Mirzim*, dragging with them several who were stunned or partly paralyzed. Edri, with a bleeding face, was capering joyously and yelling at him to hurry.

Trehearne shook his head to clear it. He ran beside Joris, stumbling up the metal stair to the apron. He was the last one through the port. Joris hauled down a lever, and the port closed and locked itself automatically with a squeal of compressed air.

Instantly the lights went on. The great generators jarred to life. Joris strode heavily down the long corridor to the bridge with Trehearne at his heels. There was another man sitting there but Joris took over the pilot chair.

Trehearne waited tensely but Joris did not touch the controls. He merely sat there, inspecting his bruised fists.

"What the hell are you waiting for?" Trehearne cried. "We've only got a few moments at most!"

Joris looked at him stolidly. "We've only got one life too. We can throw it away by starting at the wrong moment and colliding with incoming ships. I know the dispatch-schedules. Wait."

Trehearne waited. He could not hear inside the ship but he knew that by now

alarms must be shrilling all over the spaceport.

It was mad to wait. It was craven surrender. Better to run any risk of suicidal collision than to wait. . . .

And still Joris waited, an eye cocked on the chronometers, until through the window Trehearne saw lights flashing up outside and men running. And then he overheard the loom of a great ship descending fast.

Joris grunted, suddenly punched the controls. "Hang on!"

The *Mirzim* went up in a screaming arc that crumpled Trehearne to the deck. He clung to a stanchion and prayed that Joris had not lost his skill.

He had not. Even the Vardda flesh had limits. So did metal and the bones of ships. Joris knew to the fraction exactly how much they could stand. The course had already been calculated. He cleared the system, found his coordinates, then hammered the signal relays to the generator rooms.

The whine of the generators rose and the needle on the acceleration master dial rose with it. Trehearne watched it with bulging eyes, gasping under the pressure, barely restrained an impulse to scream. The second officer was clutching his chair, his face white.

Joris watched the dial. At the precise instant he punched the relay bars again. The needle ceased to blur in its frantic ascent, climbing now with a decent deliberation.

Joris turned around. He looked at his companions and shook with laughter. He had, for the first time since Trehearne had known him, the face of a completely happy man.

Trehearne staggered up. He got out a handkerchief and wiped his face. There was blood on it as well as sweat. "Well," he said. "We're off. But if you don't mind telling me now, Joris—where the devil are we off to?"

"H'm," said Joris. "This may seem a little peculiar to you in view of all the circumstances—"

He roared again with hearty mirth. "I'll tell you Trehearne. *We're off to Thavis!*"

CHAPTER XIII

Bitter Planet

TREHEARNE stared at Joris. A small trickle of blood ran from his nose down over his lip. He forgot to wipe it away.

"You're joking," he said.

"Not at all." It was Edri who answered. He had come into the bridge behind Trehearne. He cried good-naturedly, "Blast you, Joris, what are you trying to do—kill us all before we get started?"

"They'll be after us soon enough," said Joris. "We need all the edge we can get."

Trehearne demanded, "Why are we going to Thuvis?"

"Partly," said Edri soberly, "to rescue the men who are rotting away out there. But chiefly because we must have Arrin. You see, Trehearne, he was arrested before he could finish his calculations. When I tried to carry on I added a good bit of my own material—but the missing factor isn't there. Arrin has it. He must have or he couldn't have gone as far as he did. Now if we put our knowledge together—"

Edri sighed. "It's been a long, long fight. A thousand years of piecing together lie and legend and hearsay, of hunting down scraps of letters and secret reports, of dredging through tons of irrelevant nonsense in search of one little bit of truth.

"The Vardda authorities of that day suppressed or destroyed all evidence connected with that last voyage of Orthis. They did their work well. Until now no one has even known in what general sector of the Galaxy the pursuit took place.

"Yes, a long fight. And if we're wrong it means the end of hope in our generation. Others will have to begin the search all over again."

It seemed a cruel question to ask but Trehearne could not keep from it.

"Is there any proof that Orthis' ship still exists at all?"

"No. We only know that it was not destroyed at the time that Orthis outran his pursuers and disappeared. Long afterward one of the life-skiffs of his ship was picked up in space. He had known it could only be picked up by his enemies, so there was nothing inside it but a message painted large on the walls—*You have not destroyed me. The peoples of the Galaxy shall yet be given the freedom of the stars!*

Trehearne shook his head. "Orthis must have been quite a man."

"He was," said Joris. "A true man of the stars. He was born in deep space between Aldebaran and the little yellow sun that is our nearest neighbor. He was one of the last of the four generations of men and women who made the first round-trip voyage of all time into interstellar space."

Edri nodded. "He was only twenty when the ship returned to Llyrdis but spending his whole life in space had made him strange. He could not endure to be planet-bound. He built his laboratory ship and worked in it, almost alone, for another fifteen years and then announced his great discovery—the mutation, the birth of Galactic Man.

"He never gave out the whole secret of his process. He said it was too dangerous in untrained hands. He built the whole apparatus himself and handled it himself and sowed with his own hands the seed of the Vardda race that would flower in the next generation.

"He was revered almost as a demigod, at first. But there were the other planets of Aldebaran. There were the worlds of the neighboring yellow sun, inhabited by peoples of a high culture. Orthis assumed that they too were going to be included in the great new future of star-travel—they and all other star-worlds truly civilized enough to be worthy of it.

"Well, there were objections to that. Chiefest and soundest of them was the fear of terrible interstellar wars. Two parties sprang up and fiercely argued the question. Orthis' laboratory ship

was impounded and he himself was kept virtually a prisoner for many years. In the end his cause was defeated and his ship ordered destroyed.

"Orthis succeeded in escaping with his party's help. He got his ship away. It looked as though he would be victorious after all. But by this time the new Vardda race had begun to flourish and some of them were old enough to fly. So these young wolves, believing intensely in their right, haled out after the old man, who clung just as intensely to his own beliefs.

"He was undoubtedly able to endure ultra-speeds himself, for it was a long and bitter chase. They partially disabled his ship but even so he managed to elude them. There was no ultra-wave radar or radio in those early days and after all he had cut his teeth on the stars. They lost him. And that was the end of Orthis and his ship. Except for the life-skiff's message he was never heard of again."

Edri paused, then added, "Do you wonder that we venerate such a man?" "I think," said Trehearne slowly, "that you have his kind of courage."

"Maybe." Edri laughed. "I do know I have a most colossal thirst. You didn't forget the wine stores, Joris?"

"The gods forbid!"

"Let's go and drink." Edri took Trehearne's arm. "And you can tell me a story—where you came from and what in blazes you're doing here!"

"No," said Trehearne, without relish. "I think I'd better see about Shairn."

Edri's jaw dropped. "Shairn?"

"Yes, unfortunately—Shairn." He explained rapidly how the extra passenger came aboard.

EDRI said some low, hard words. "That isn't going to help matters one little bit. We can hardly leave her on Thuvis and we can't stop anywhere else."

"It couldn't be helped," growled Joris.

"No. Well, I think I'll go with you, Trehearne. I don't believe you'd be safe alone!"

They found her, locked in an officer's cabin for which, on this short-handed

trip, there was no officer. She was still bound and gagged. From the look she gave them Trehearne thought she would have killed them both if she had the power.

He freed her. She sat up on the bunk, rubbing her wrists. Two red marks ran from the corners of her mouth across her white cheeks where the gag had rubbed. It gave her a comical expression, like the mask of a clown. There was nothing comical about her eyes.

She did not speak.

Trehearne said awkwardly, "Shairn, I'm sorry about all this. But you might as well make the best of it now you're here."

Still she did not speak. She only sat and looked at him.

Edri said, "Come on, Shairn. A glass of wine will do you good."

She ignored him. Silence and the green deadly eyes, fixed on Trehearne.

He went to her and put his hand on her shoulder. "Be reasonable, Shairn. I know how you feel but none of it was done with intent. And we're all your friends, whether you agree with us or not."

He jerked back but not quite in time. Her claws raked his cheek. He stepped away. She sat motionless and said not one word.

Trehearne swung on his heel and went out. Edri came after him, and locked the door. "Perhaps Joris can talk to her," he said. His tone did not hold much hope.

"Oh, she'll come out of it," said Trehearne. "Nobody can stay that mad forever."

Edri shook his head. "I've known her longer than you have. I wouldn't count on it."

The intercom boomed over their heads—Joris calling from the bridge.

"Edri—will you and Trehearne step up here? The bad news is starting to come in."

Communications was just abaft the bridge. Joris had relinquished the controls to the Second and was standing in the cramped space behind the opera-

tor, listening intently to the thin metallic voice that came from the ultra-wave receiver.

"Channel One—Alert. All ships in Sector M29 . . . request radar confirmation on ship believed on course as follows . . ."

"Port radar base would have got our coordinates at take-off, of course," said Joris. "They're just making sure."

"Listen," said Edri.

The metallic voice finished repeating the coordinates. It went on. *"All ships will identify immediately when challenged. All ships will identify . . ."*

"Cruisers," said Edri.

Joris frowned. "They could man at least one in a hurry. I told you we'd need a head start."

He returned to the bridge to inspect the dials and order the generators stepped up.

"We'll have to reach acceleration peak in half the normal time or we might as well have stayed on Llyrdia. I'm going to see what radar has turned up."

Trehearne followed along, brooding on the subject of cruisers. The Vardda had no warships, being in the enviable position of having no use for them. But the Council maintained a small fleet of armed craft with maximum velocities considerably above those of the slower cargo ships, for the purpose of keeping down occasional outbursts of illegal trading among the Vardda themselves.

The three-dimensional radar screens showed the normal number of tiny red sparks—the faster-than-light energy impulses of ships' generators. Joris scanned them with a practiced eye.

"Nothing to bother us yet. Too early to tell—the sector immediately behind us is too crowded with shipping from the port." He turned to the technician. "Keep a damn sharp lookout astern. Call me the minute you see anything unusual. You're on a twelve-hour shift and I'll arrange for your relief."

Relief was a problem on that voyage. No one got much of it. They had slightly over half the number of men required for a full crew under normal circum-

stances and some of them were not trained technicians. Trehearne found himself doing one eight-hour trick on the bridge, calling out dial readings, and another in Communications. Since, obviously, there was no sending to be done he could handle the receiver well enough.

Channel One, which was the official, top-priority voice of the Vardda Council, continued to request—and get—confirmation of their course.

It was not long before Quorn, their Communications officer, reported that radar showed a red spark astern that seemed to be following their course.

CALCULATING distance by intensity it was possible to judge the rate of approach. Joris demanded more thrust from the generators, ignoring the shuddering agony of the hull and the equally painful reactions of his men.

"Until we pick up Arrin," he said, "it's got to be cut and run. Thuvis is the first place they'll block off and anything but a direct course on our part will give them time to do it."

They reached their acceleration peak—maximum stress for the fabric of the ship. Joris pushed it over. They prayed.

The observation port began to show a thinning star-field ahead. Wider and wider the areas of darkness spread and the colonies of suns were fewer and more scattered. The red sparks on the radar screens dwindled and faded until only two or three were left—lonely traders, outbound to these isolated systems. Those—and the single spark that brightened always astern.

The hours became a lagging monotony of constant watching, constant strain. Numb from lack of sleep, Trehearne went mechanically through his duties, forgot even to worry about what was going to happen. Yesterday was an eon ago, tomorrow was lost in nothingness. There was only today and he was tired.

It was the same with all of them. Joris seemed neither more nor less exhausted than the rest and Trehearne marveled at the old man's strength.

Shairne remained locked in her cabin. She would not speak to anyone, except the youngster who brought her food, then only to voice a curt thanks.

Ahead the darkness deepened. The main axis of the Milky Way plane was "below" them. Beyond the isolated systems they could glimpse the lightless gulf of utter emptiness. Its black blankness afflicted Trehearne with a creeping horror. It was like seeing the primal Chaos before creation.

At last a dim red sun was centered in the field. It began to grow. The radar screens were empty, save for the one grim following spark that had become almost a flame, ominously bright.

Joris made his calculations and again they prayed.

They completed deceleration in a little less than half the normal time. That was the period during which no one ate and only those who had to remained erect.

Thuvis hung in the sky before them, an idiot sun, devouring the last of its strength and peering with a dull red eye at the cosmic face of death. It was circled by a single world.

"We'll have to make it fast," said Joris harshly. "You be ready, Edri."

The *Mirzim* landed on an arid tableland swept by bitter winds. Quorn stayed to maintain his tense vigil at the radar screens but the rest of them went out, glad of solid ground if only for a few minutes.

The wind-driven dust tore at Trehearne, cutting into his flesh like tiny cold knives. The sky was dusky at midday but there were few stars. Even at night there would be few stars here.

The sullen glare of Thuvis washed the dusty desert world with red and where a deep ravine cleft the tableland the shadows clung like clotted blood. Trehearne could not think of a place that more resembled hell.

Edri had hastened to the lip of the ravine. Trehearne followed and looked down. Below the steep sides, below the ugly screens, was a tangle of pallid vegetation, stunted trees and leprous shrubbery, clustered around warm springs

that smoked like little fumaroles in the chill air. There was a settlement here, three or four small plastic structures surrounded by a wall, outside the wall a pathetic expanse of filled land.

"They're coming!" cried Edri. "They saw the ship. . . ."

A narrow path led steeply up from the ravine. Men were already toiling along it. Trehearne counted them. Eight, ten, eleven—eleven men, the total population of this world of ultimate exile.

Edri was shouting. His voice echoed back and forth in the ravine with a hollow booming sound. Other shouts answered him. The men on the path began to run. They slipped and staggered in their haste, clawing their way upward. Trehearne could see their white faces strained toward him.

He watched them come—gaunt wind-bitten hopeless men with the greyness of living death upon them, striving up from that deep red-lit prison, answering the call of Edri's voice. He saw their eyes, the eyes of men called back suddenly from that terrible numbing of the mind that is worse than clean destruction.

Edri threw his arms around the man who came first over the rim. He had not been there as long as the others and the stamp was not so deep on him. He turned and shouted at his mates to hurry. His beard and his unkempt hair blew in the wind and his voice was wild.

Edri cried to him, "No time for talk now, Arrin! Is that all of you?"

It was. The line of bearded scarecrows hastened toward the *Mirzim*. Ready hands helped them in.

The voice of Quorn yelled over the intercom, "They're right on top of us! Hurry it up!"

Joris had thrust his way forward to the bridge. He was at his station and waiting before the port was closed.

"Ready for take-off! Watch yourselves!"

His hand reached out for the signal relays. And then Trehearne saw it hesitate and fall back.

From the opening door of the Communications room another voice spoke,

perfectly audible at that short distance—the metallic voice of the receiver.

"We have your range. Do not attempt to take off. We have your range. Do not attempt . . ."

Over Joris' suddenly shrunken shoulders, through the bridge port, Trehearne saw the long slim shape of a cruiser sweep in toward a landing close beside them.

CHAPTER XIV

Toward the Shores of Night

KERREL'S face appeared on the small screen. There was no need now for the ultra-wave and the ordinary visiphone unit had been cut in. Edri and Joris confronted him. Trehearne stood in the doorway, listening. Behind him were the rescued exiles and black despair was on them all.

Kerrel regarded Edri and Joris with weary hatred. He seemed to have learned that being an agent of the Council had its rough side. But there was no slightest hint of leniency in his tone.

"The gun crew has orders to open fire in exactly fifteen minutes," he said. "You have that long to clear your ship, bringing with you neither weapons nor personal gear of any sort." He repeated, "Fifteen minutes precisely."

Joris looked at him with red and sunken eyes. Twenty years of age had come upon him in the last few minutes. He could not seem to bring himself to speak. Edri's hands were clenched so tightly that the fingers were bone white. They moved back and forth, seeking something to strike and not finding it. He too had become old.

"Fourteen minutes," said Kerrel, without emotion. "You're wasting time."

Edri turned abruptly and thrust his way blindly past Trehearne, who caught and held him in the doorway.

"Let go," said Edri viciously and cursed him. "That ravine is deep. I can

step off into it now as well as later. I won't be taken back."

"Hold on," said Trehearne. A sudden wild hope had come to him. He lifted his voice. "Kerrel! Kerrel, can you hear me?" He was out of visual range of the screen.

"Yes, Trehearne, I hear you."

"Then listen! Tell your men to hold their fire. *We have Shairn aboard!*"

Joris' head came up sharply. Edri stopped fighting. And in the screen Kerrel's mirrored face went through the shadings of surprise, shock, then understanding and a wry mirth.

"You have a quick mind, Trehearne," he said. "But it won't do. Thirteen minutes."

"Go and get her, Edri," said Trehearne. His mouth was dry, his body drenched with cold sweat.

Edri plunged away into the corridor. Trehearne went and stood where Kerrel could see him. He smiled and wondered if Kerrel could hear the knocking of his heart against his ribs.

Joris stood motionless, waiting. Kerrel counted off the minutes, and at each count his voice became more strained, his eyes less certain.

There were six minutes left when Edri came back with Shairn and thrust her in front of the screen.

"You see?" said Trehearne. "I wasn't lying."

Kerrel forgot to count. He stared at the girl, the strong lines of his face crumbling into indecision. He said her name once. Suddenly he turned and was gone from the screen. They could hear him shouting somewhere beyond, "Hold your fire! Hold your fire! They have a prisoner aboard."

Trehearne knew then that he had not misjudged the depth of the other's passion. And strangely that knowledge was bitter to him.

Kerrel came into view again, and Shairn cried out, "Kerrel, they're after something more than these Orhist exiles! I think they're—"

Trehearne put his hand over her mouth. "It doesn't matter what she thinks. The only important thing is her

life. How much is it worth to you, Kerrel?"

Kerrel ran his hand nervously over his face and did not answer at once. Trehearne kept his palm firmly on Shairn's mouth.

Kerrel shook his head. "You wouldn't kill her, Trehearne."

"No, I wouldn't," Trehearne said. "But I'm only one and there are others aboard. Eleven men of Thuvis, who feel that one life is very little to pay for escape from this hell-hole. Come on, Kerrel, how much is Shairn worth to you? You can have her—free, clear and alive."

Kerrel asked, "What do you want?"

"A head start."

"It won't do you any good. You can't outrun a cruiser."

Joris said, "We'll take that chance!"

Again Kerrel hesitated. "What are your terms?"

Trehearne said, "You will allow us to take off and we'll guarantee to land Shairn safely on the other side of this planet. You will keep your ship here until you receive our message that that has been done. We will both be able to check each other's actions by radar and if your generators are started before our second take-off we'll know it."

Kerrel gnawed his lip and then asked sullenly, "What assurance have I that you will actually release her?"

"You can take my word for that," Trehearne told him. "Either that or blow her to bits with the rest of us."

There was another long tense moment of silence. And then Kerrel said, "All right." He spoke the words as though they had a taste of vitriol on his tongue.

Joris was out of Communications in one long stride. Kerrel looked at Shairn and cried, "Wait! You must radio your position when you set her down."

"We will."

Trehearne flipped the switch. The screen went blank. The throbbing generators took the ship and lifted it and whirled it away and no gun spoke from the cruiser. Trehearne released his grip on Shairn. Reaction and relief had turned his knees to water, so that it was

difficult to stand against the lurching of the ship.

Shairn turned and looked at him. "You're a fool, Michael," she said, "but I'll give you this. You're not a coward."

HE had her locked in her cabin again and went back to the bridge. Joris was scowling at the projection of the microfilm chart of the planet.

"There," he said and pointed to a huge emptiness. "She'll be safe there until they pick her up—there's no predatory life in these deserts." He glanced up at Trehearne. "Good man," he said. "Me, I was beaten."

Trehearne gave him a wry smile. "Me, I bluffed. From here on, Joris, it's all yours. Where's Edri?"

"Shut in his cabin with Arrin. They know the general sector, clear out at the galaxy's edge. Now they're trying to figure out the true course together." And Joris snorted. "Course! If I can keep one jump ahead of that cruiser I'll be satisfied."

The *Mirzim* skimmed over the darkling world of Thuvis into the starless night. Trehearne sat and brooded, thinking of Shairn, thinking of the two men who were bent over the final calculations of a dream that had balked men for a thousand years.

He thought of what a dream can do to a man, of how far it can lead him away from the good safe life of common sense to the ultimate voids of creation. He hoped that Edri and Arrin would find what they wanted. He hoped they would live to find it.

"Coming down," said Joris. "Better get Shairn a coverall. It's cold there."

Trehearne found a warm coverall in the equipment locker and took it to Shairn's cabin. She put it on and he saw how her face was shadowed by weariness and strain.

She said quietly, "Do you still love me, Michael?"

Her question took him by surprise, and the answer came of itself. "Yes," he said. "I do."

"Then we must stop behaving like two angry children and not throw away

the life we can have together."

He bent his head. "I'm sorry you got caught in this."

"It's as much my fault as yours. I was too quick to lose my temper. I should have stopped to think that the Vardda world was so new to you that you had little to judge it by."

She was not now the mocking Shairn of old. Her voice was full of a somb're passion, a pleading for him to understand.

"Michael, your motives were good—devotion to a friend, reaction against what seemed to you injustice. But surely now you must see how hopeless this all is. I know you're hunting Orthia's ship. You'll never reach it. Kerrel will run you down. It'll all have been for nothing."

It seemed to Trehearne that what she said was very likely true. But he only answered, "It's too late to think about that now."

"No, Michael! You can still save yourself!" She caught him by the shoulders, her hands urgent on his flesh. Her touch could still do things to him. "Leave the ship with me! Let Kerrel pick us both up!"

Trehearne smiled mirthlessly. "Kerrel would like that—taking me back to a prison."

"It doesn't have to be prison!" Shairn exclaimed. "You can say you pretended to join Joris and Edri only to save me! I'll back you up and not Kerrel nor anyone else can disprove it. You'll walk out free on Llyrdis!"

It crossed his mind that he could do that. It would all fit. It was an out.

"You won't be letting your friends down, either," Shairn insisted. "They'll go on without you. You've done all you can for them."

She clung to him. Her mouth begged him with a silent language of its own.

He took her arms slowly from around him and thrust her back and she caught her breath at the pain of his grip.

"No," he said. And again, "No, Shairn."

She stood back and looked at him steadily. "You could go back to the Sil-

ver Tower with me but you won't—and for what? So that peoples you've never met on worlds you'll never see can someday fly the stars?"

"There was a man named Trehearne on the world Earth who got his chance to fly the stars," he said. "I thought that others should have their chance too. I have to play it out now."

She was silent and then the dropping speed of the ship told them that it was almost over. Trehearne took her down to the airlock chamber. They stood there together, not finding anything more to say, and all that had been between them came silently and mocked them with the pain of vanished days.

The *Mirzisa* scraped her keel softly on a yielding surface and was still. Trehearne opened the port, looking out on the dark windy desert.

Shairn spoke then. "A strange beginning for us, Michael, and now an even stranger ending. You told me once I would be sorry I ever met you. I am."

He held out his hand to help her down and the pressure of her fingers was like something tearing at his heart.

She looked up at him, a small lonely figure in the vast dark. He thought her lips moved but the wind came between them and took the words away and he had none of his own for answer.

The warning bell jarred harshly in his ears. He closed the port and she was gone.

Joris' voice roared from the hridge, through the intercom. "Flatten out, all! This is the only start we'll get on Kerrel and I've got to pile it on!"

The cruel hand of acceleration crushed Trehearne down. He lay on the scored plates of the deck and that last vision of Shairn's white face remained with him to remind him of all that he had had and lost.

He said her name over and over in the silence of the empty lock and his mouth was filled with the bitter taste of dust. The *Mirzisa* leaped through space like a wild thing, driving toward the sector that was the goal of a thousand-year hope and quest, toward the galaxy edge and the shores of outer night.

CHAPTER XV

World of Death

THEY had stepped clear out to the edge of the galaxy, where the fringing stars were lost in the outer void and the dead suns swept forever through the entombing dark, where even the memory of creation was gone, blotted out by unimaginable time.

Trehearne tried to remember how long it had been since they had taken off from Thuvis. He gave it up. It didn't matter. He peered with aching blood-shot eyes into the lightless seas that lie between the island universes and tried to remember why he had come here. And that too was dim in his mind.

Edri was bent over a table that had been set up in the bridge. He no longer looked like Edri. He seemed to have been working for a million years. Arrin sat near him. He held his head between his bony hands, a bearded mummy embalmed upright, hardly retaining the semblance of life.

There were charts under Edri's hands, endless sheets of calculations, endless miles of figures. Joris studied them, bending beside Edri. His broad jowls hung down now over his wrinkled collar. His eyes had sunk deep under ridges of bone, peering out as from two shadowed caves.

Edri was talking in a voice that came from far away. The words reached Trehearne in droning snatches from beyond the fog of weariness.

"—so our only way to locate Orthhis' ship was to triangulate its position from two separate bearings on it. One bearing was the course of that life-skiff Orthhis sent in with his last message, allowing for aberrations caused by the gravitational field of stars. The other bearing was Orthhis' course in his last flight. We couldn't get that till I found the part of the Lankar manuscript that Arrin didn't have."

Trehearne heard someone ask, "Who

was Lankar?"

"One of Orthhis' last pursuers, who left a secret log of the pursuit to ease his guilty conscience. Enough of it survived—"

Joris said, "The hell with Lankar. Get on with it."

"We had to push the star-maps back in time—galactic motion, star streaming, a million complicated problems of relative motion and proper motion, back five hundred years and then another five hundred and then correlate them. That work's been going on a long, long time."

Edri drew a long breath that was coupled with a racking yawn.

"The charts indicate an unnamed dark star following an orbit here, outside the main stream of the galaxy." He traced a line with his finger. "These charts for the fringing stars are incomplete as you know. There's nothing to draw anyone out to these godforsaken regions and they've never been properly explored.

"But according to our calculations that star was in the right place a thousand years ago and Orthhis' life-skiff was launched from there. Now the wheel of the galaxy has turned so, taking the dark star with it . . ."

He laid his hand on the crossing of two marked lines on the chart. "That's our destination, Joris. If we're right the ship of Orthhis is there. If we're wrong—well, somebody else will have to try again in another thousand years."

He remained standing, silent, his hands braced on the table, too tired to move. Joris rubbed his bleary eyes and began to read the coordinates aloud from the chart. Mechanically the Second Officer set up the combination on the finder.

Joris moved heavily back to the pilot chair. He set the *Mirsim* on her new course. Then he spoke over the intercom to Radar. "What's the position of the cruiser?"

A croaking voice answered him. He listened. "Closer," he said. "Always closer."

Trehearne's mind turned back to its constant half-waking nightmare. The

cruiser, following, hanging on, dogged, persistent, relentless. He lived over painfully every maneuver, every trick by which Joris had managed to delay their pursuer, to grasp a little more time, a little more distance.

He remembered the last-minute plunge into a dark nebula when the cruiser was almost close enough to range them. He remembered the turning and twisting and doubling inside the blackness of the cloud, where the absorptive cosmic dust fogged the radar. They had lost the cruiser there. They had got clear away and for a time they had hoped. They had made it to this fringe sector—and then the red spark showed again on the screen, coming closer, always closer.

There were times when Trehearne forgot the physical fact of the cruiser, a ship of ordinary metal officered and manned by ordinary Vardda spacemen. At such times it seemed to him that the *Mirzim* was pursued by a demonic nemesis striding naked across the plunging gulfs—a nemesis wearing Kerrel's face with Kerrel's hands outstretched to grasp them.

Sometimes Shairn's face was there beside Kerrel's, white, unreadable, a misty cloud that blotted out the stars.

The hoarse voice of the radar man croaked at intervals. The ship fled on toward the dark star.

Joris turned around. The table had been taken out, the charts and the toil-some calculations rolled up and shoved away. Arrin lay on the deck against the after bulkhead, sleeping. He would not leave the bridge until he knew whether or not his life and work had gone for nothing. Edri sat beside him. He was not asleep.

Joris said flatly, "It isn't going to work."

Edri said nothing. He waited.

Joris went on, as though he bated what he was saying, but had to say it. "Look at it. As soon as I start deceleration the cruiser will begin to cut our lead to nothing. And they're stressed for less deceleration time than I can make without tearing the *Mirzim* to

pieces. What'll happen? They'll be on us before we can even begin our search."

Edri nodded. He leaned back against the bulkhead and closed his eyes. He said, "They know now what we're after. What do you suppose Kerrel would do if he found the ship of Orthis?"

NOBODY answered that. There was no need to answer. A heavy silence followed, during which Trehearne thought of the messages that had gone out across the galaxy from the cruiser's ultra-wave—guarded messages that betrayed by their very sparseness the desperate nature of this mission, urgent requests for other Council cruisers to close up with all speed.

The others were still too far away to matter. Whatever happened would have happened before they could come up. Kerrel was going to finish this alone.

Edri said, "What are we going to do?"

Joris rubbed his big hand over his stubbled face and blinked, and said, "Our only chance, if Orthis' ship and secret are really there, is to get the ultra-wave equipment to it in time for what we planned."

He went on slowly. "I think the life-skiff could carry that equipment. If we drop the skiff it would travel on constant velocity for a while before it would have to decelerate. Meanwhile I could swing the *Mirzim* on another course, running back along the rim of the galaxy, away from the dark star. The cruiser would follow me. Chances are, with their radar concentrated on me to catch my lateral-impulse pattern, they wouldn't notice the skiff at all when she started deceleration."

He sighed. "They'd catch us, of course. But the *Mirzim* isn't going to keep on forever after the beating she's taken. The generators are in bad shape. But we could keep going long enough to give you time."

Edri thought it over. "I don't like it," he said. "But it looks as though it's that or nothing."

Joris was muttering under his breath about maximum loads and capacity. "The main ultra-wave equipment," he

said, "and three men. The skiff would take that. We'd keep the auxiliary ultra-wave set here, of course."

"Who can you spare? You'll need all your flight technicians."

"He can spare me," said Trehearne. "I'm the most nonessential. And I can still stand up if I have to."

Joris nodded. "Yea, Quorn has to go to handle the ultra-wave, of course—and he can handle the skiff all right."

"Who else?"

"You," said Joris.

Edri looked at the sleeping Arrin. "He ought to go instead. He's worked for it longer than I have." It was obvious that Arrin was unable to go anywhere and Edri sighed. He pulled himself erect. "All right, then. Come on, Trehearne. We'll start loading."

The skiff was contained in a cell of its own, sunk in the side of the *Mirzim*—a miniature starship with a flight range long enough to give the crew of a disabled ship a chance to reach safety.

Trehearne routed out every man that was off-station and could stand erect. Following Edri's orders he stripped the skiff of everything they wouldn't need. Quorn oversaw the removal of the heavy ultra-wave radio equipment from the *Mirzim* and its loading into the skiff. He seemed unnecessarily particular about it. Trehearne swore and sweated but got it done.

He went back up to the bridge with Edri and Quorn. Joris studied his instruments.

"Pretty soon," he said. He gave Quorn his flight instructions. "Trehearne is still a lubber," he remarked, "but he knows enough by now to give you a hand when you need it."

Edri said, "Surrender as soon as you're challenged, Joris."

Joris laughed, a pallid ghost of his old loud roar. "I will. Right now, I'm too tired to die." He glanced again at the instruments. "Time to go."

They looked at each other, these fatigue-drunken red-eyed men whom a dream had dragged to the edge of the universe, and could find nothing to say in this moment of their parting.

"Good luck," muttered Edri then and turned away.

"You're the ones who're going to need it," Joris called after them.

Trehearne went through after Quorn and Edri into the skiff. Quorn took its controls and waited, watching his chronometer. His hand grasped loosely about a red-switch marked RELEASE.

He closed the switch.

There was a squeal and grind of machinery, an instant of extreme pressure, then the skiff had left the *Mirzim*. Though they could not see, they knew that skiff and ship had already diverged far apart at their unthinkable speeds.

Quorn watched his instruments while Trehearne and Edri sat looking at nothing, afraid to sleep lest they should not be able to wake again.

Presently Quorn started his forward generator and began deceleration.

Trehearne lost track of things. Part of the following time he was unconscious or nearly so. The rest of it he observed as in a confused dream. He thought of how he had once been wild for starflight. But he managed to do the things that Quorn required of him.

The port cleared. It had no adapter and functioned as a port only at visual speeds. Now, ahead of them, Trehearne could see a huge bulk of darkness against the outer dark, illumined only faintly by the galactic light.

"There it is," said Edri. "The dark star." His voice shook a little.

They swept closer, still slowing down. "It has a planet," said Quorn. "There, catching the starshine—"

"Two," said Trehearne. "I see two."

TWO dimly gleaming bodies, dead worlds clinging to a long dead sun out here at Galaxy edge. The glow of the Milky Way touched them, the ghostly glow of candles at a wake.

Edri whispered, "We'll try the outer planet first. Give me a band, Trehearne."

They crawled aft between the crowded banks of equipment to a detector that had come from the *Mirzim's* hold. Edri fumbled at it.

"In Orthis' day they used radioactive fuel, of course," Edri mumbled. We calculated its half-life. Even supposing his bunkers were nearly empty there should be enough left to register on this counter. A teacupful would do it."

Trehearne helped Edri adjust the shielding apparatus on the mechanism until the needle was still.

"What about radioactive deposits on the planets themselves?" he asked.

"We get a break there. Too old. The last radioactive element will have died millions of years ago."

He raised his voice. "Keep the skiff as low as you dare, Quorn. The counter has a wide sweep. Take it slow."

He crouched over the telltale. Trehearne moved forward again.

The planet was small, less than two thousand miles in diameter. Between the intense gloom and the motion of the skiff he could see nothing but a black featureless desolation, rifted here and there with white that he took to be the frozen remains of an atmosphere. He thought what it would be like to land there and shivered.

They swept the planet carefully. The telltale needle of the counter remained motionless. Edri said heavily, "We'll go on. Pray we find it on the other planet. Pray Orthis didn't come down on the dead star. It would take forever to find him there."

Quorn fed in power and cleared away. The port dimmed again and Edri moaned.

"He's about out," Quorn said. "Looks like whatever is done we'll have to do the most of it."

The second world was larger than the first by three times or more. It was not content to be featureless. It thrust up gnawed and shattered ranges, stripped bones of mountains sheathed in frozen gases. It showed forth dreary plains coated white with congealed air, glistening faintly in the light of the great galactic wheel.

It turned toward the watchers the naked beds of its vanished oceans, sucked dry to the deepest gulf. It displayed the scars of its long dying, the

brutal wounds of internal explosion, the riven gashes of a shrinking crust. A hideous world that seemed to remember beauty still and resent the cruelty of death.

Edri whispered, "Pray—pray that the damned thing moves." Instead of doing so he cursed the needle that it did not stir.

"Keep going," said Trehearne.

They kept going.

The needle quivered.

Edri let out a hoarse cry. "Easy! Easy!" Tears began to run down his cheeks. He sobbed. The needle jerked.

"Circle!" Trehearne shouted to Quorn. "Circle till we get it centered."

He ran his tongue over his lips and tasted salt and wondered how it got there.

Quorn swung the skiff around in a tightening spiral. "Now," said Edri. "Let her down."

He scrambled forward, thrusting his face against the port, trying to see. Quorn switched on a landing light. The blue-white blaze lit up a circular area below, the light intensely bright, the shadows intensely black. Its beam went sharply down.

They followed it. It was as though the skiff were poised on that pillar of light, sinking downward.

They were above a planetary surface racked and tortured by final diastrophism. Towering miles high, loomed a mighty cliff of riven rock. In front of it a chasm yawned and beyond the abyss a drear and tumbled landscape stretched dim under the great sword of the galaxy.

They started down along the face of the titanic cliff. Looking at the chasm at its base Trehearne began to get uneasy.

"There's no ship here," he said. "The counter must have picked up some last radiation from deep down in that chasm."

Quorn agreed with him. But Edri said, "No, keep going." Trehearne could feel him tremble.

They went on down the face of the giant, looming wall.

Trehearne pointed suddenly. "Isn't

that a ledge?"

The hard bright edge of the beam cut across a shelf of rock that jutted out halfway down the cliff. Quorn swung the skiff in closer. Something on the ledge glistened dully under the light.

Quorn let the skiff drop with a sickening rush. Detail sprang clear—shattered rock, ancient magma, puddles of frozen air in the hollows. And among them an ovoid shape, symmetrical, smooth, giving back a metallic glint.

Edri said the name of Orthis, as though it were a prayer.

CHAPTER XVI

The Star-Born

QUORN had set the skiff down on the ledge. They had scrambled into pressure suits. They had forgotten that they were already three-quarters dead.

Awkward in the clumsy armor, stumbling on the jagged rock, slipping on the patches of frozen air, they clawed their way toward the goal they had crossed a galaxy and gambled their lives to find. Above them the ghastly cliff leaned outward against nothingness, below them the abyss plunged down into the dead heart of a world. Beyond them was spreading desolation and in the black sky the awful rim of the Galaxy lay like a blazing sword of light.

Trehearne was aware of the silence. He had never been on an airless world before. He felt the impact as his metal boot struck against a shard of rock but it made no sound. All he could hear was the harsh breathing of Quorn and Edri, transmitted to him by the helmet audio.

The ship of Orthis loomed before them, lightless, lifeless, cradled in the ashes of destruction. It had a look of patience. It had lain here waiting for a thousand years, untouched by time or rust, entombed in silence and the endless night, eternal as the dead suns that rove forever in uncorrupting space. It seemed that it could wait until the end

of time, cherishing its trust.

Awe came upon Trehearne and with it a kind of fear.

They found the lock port. It stood wide open, the valves still clean and shining. The light of Trehearne's belt-lamp showed him, on the floor of the lock chamber, the scored marks of a man's boots. They might have been made only yesterday.

The three men paused outside that open port. They looked at each other through their glassite helmets and their faces were strange. Then Trehearne stepped aside, and Quorn also. Edri bent his head. He moved forward to the port.

Silently he clambered into the ship of Orthis.

The others were close behind him. Their belt lamps cut hard slashes of light across the dark. They passed through the lock chamber and came into a corridor running fore and aft. It was utterly still. The heavy drag of their boots on the metal deck made not the slightest sound. Trehearne could hear the beating of his own blood in his ears, the dull throbbing of his heart.

The whole after section of the ship was a laboratory. Much of the delicate equipment was shattered, either by speed-vibration or a hard landing. Trehearne could not make sense out of any of it but Quorn said, "He was studying interstellar radiation. Most of that stuff is beyond me, but I can see that much."

One section of the laboratory contained a complicated mass of coils and prisms and intricate banks of reflectors arranged around what must have been a great central tube. There was a small platform at the focal point of the mechanism, fitted with straps. Along one bulkhead was a stack of metal cages for experimental animals. Several of the little creatures were still there. They had died, the quick death of airlessness and cold, but their bodies were still perfect. They had, then, survived the voyage.

Edri's voice came over the helmet audio. "Nothing for us here," he said. "No good trying to figure out this apparatus—they couldn't do that in all the

years they had the ship impounded. Most of it Orthis designed and built himself."

Trehearne was still looking at the small furry bodies in the cages, lying as though in sleep. Somehow they made the betrayal of Orthis and his dream doubly cruel—that even beasts could be given the freedom of the stars, that so many generations of the races of many worlds had been denied.

He turned and went forward with the others. They glanced into the living quarters. They were small and spare. The coverings of the bunk were rumpled and the pillow still retained the hollow where a man's head had lain. Trehearne shivered. They passed on to the bridge.

Trehearne realized then what an act of heroism it had been to push this antique ship to the limits of the Galaxy and beyond. The instruments were so few and rudimentary, the system of controls so crude. There was a locking device, an Iron Mike that could keep the ship on its course without human attention. The science of starflight had come a long way since then.

He remembered that this craft had not been built for starflight but rather as a spatial laboratory. And he wondered that it had survived at all.

THERE was a door in the after bulkhead of the bridge. He went to it and looked through into the cabin beyond. The beam of his belt lamp speared brightly into the immemorial dark.

Trehearne uttered a hoarse cry. The others ran to him. He was clinging to the bulkhead then, the cold sweat pouring down his face, his eyes staring. They looked past him, over his shoulder.

The cabin was small. It was fitted as a library, crammed with metal cases of books, some of them microfilm volumes of an ancient type, others thick ragged notebooks. There was a great table, bolted down, and on the table was a metal box.

Behind the table was a man.

He sat in a metal chair. His right arm was outstretched, clenched fist resting squarely on the metal box as though de-

manding that it be noticed. His head was lifted, looking toward the glassite port that showed the black sky slashed across with the mighty fires of the Galaxy.

He was an old man. The years of his life had not been kind to him. They had shaped his face as though from dark iron, gouging the lines deep, hammering the ridges hard, driving out all traces of youth and hope to forge a mask of bitter anger and reproach and in the end despair.

It seemed to Trehearne that he could read a whole life history in that face, caught forever in the moment of death, when surely the man was crying out upon whatever gods he worshipped, demanding *Why?*

Edri made a strange harsh sound in his throat. "Orthis," he whispered. "Orthis! For a moment I thought . . ."

"So did I," Trehearne admitted. "He does look alive, all right."

Here in the airless utter cold, death held no decay, no change. But there was more to it than the lack of physical corruption. The fire in this man had burned so deep that even death could not erase its scars.

"I think," said Trehearne, "that he wanted whoever found him to look inside that box." He suddenly wanted to get away from this funeral ship.

They went in and he reached out and tried to move Orthis' hand from off the box. The arm was frozen rigid as a steel bar. Trehearne gave it up, and worked the box out from under it.

It was unlocked. He lifted up the lid. The lamplight showed a notebook bound in cloth. On top of it lay a loose sheet of paper with a few angular lines of writing. Edri read aloud:

"I have clung to life this much longer to write down for the first time all my formulae, complete and simplified so that they can be understood and used. In them lies the freedom of the stars. I, the first of the Star-Born, was rejected by the greed and fear of the planet-born before but it will not be always so. . . .

"I shall not see what comes. My ship has already flown too far, I have little

fuel and I am old. Therefore I have set the airlock control and in a few minutes it will open, a swift death and better than a slow one.

"After that, I shall wait. What I dreamed will never be forgotten. Someday will come others who believe as I do that the stars are for all men!"

Edri fell silent and then he whispered, "He watched the Galaxy for a thousand years and waited."

Trehearne forced himself to break the spell. "We only have a little time!" he warned. He shut the box. "This is what you need. Let's go."

They went out of the silent ship. Trehearne looked up at the flaming river of stars in the sky and thought what a mighty dream the first of Star-Born men had carried with him into the long night.

He began to run toward the skiff, holding the box tight. A sudden panic of haste came over him. It seemed to him that Orthis had given them this trust with his own hands. If they failed now for lack of time . . .

He shouted at the others, thrust them on, harried them into the skiff. They took off from the ledge. They did not want to be near the ship of Orthis when they did what they were going to do. Quorn sent the light craft racing across the dead world, searching for a place to land.

"Keep your pressure suits on and your helmets ready," he said.

Edri bent over the notebook from the metal box, tremblingly reading.

"It's all here—the equations, the formulae, the instructions," he said hoarsely. "I don't understand them but others will!"

He looked at Trehearne with red-rimmed eyes. "Orthis has a foreword here. And he was the first of the Star-Born. The mutation began spontaneously on that first long voyage. The constant vibration of speed—not speed as we know it now but more than the human body was used to, speed approaching the velocity of light—and the impact of interstellar radiation on the living cell. That's what did it. Orthis was the end-product of four generations of

breeding under those conditions.

"He was nature's first attempt to create Galactic Man, to readjust the human body to meet new needs. And the thing he labored on so long was the reduction of that long natural process to a workable formula that could accomplish the change in one generation instead of four. He found it, of course. And it's all here."

Quorn broke in, "This place looks as good as any! At least it'll give us a little more cover."

He was taking the skiff down carefully toward the flat bed of an ancient watercourse. The channel was filled now with frozen air but in bygone ages it had gouged a deep canyon in the rock, leaving eroded holes and overhangs. Quorn worked the skiff into one of these, under the canyon wall.

Edri was going over his book again, making sure, dazed with the hypnosis of exhaustion and the need to be right. He did not dare to fumble or read a figure wrong. Trehearne realized the weight of responsibility.

Trehearne himself went aft with Quorn and began to struggle with the ultra-wave equipment. He was possessed by a demon of urgency, and he had not the slightest idea what he was doing. Quorn gave orders, and Trehearne obeyed. Hooking the power leads to the skiff's generators was the hardest task of all.

Somehow they finished it. They sat Edri down in front of the transmitter with his book. Quorn adjusted switches. The generators hummed, feeding power into the big transmitter. Edri blinked, moistening dry lips.

Quorn said, "I've got it on the emergency band, covering all channels. Every ultra-wave receiver within its range will pick it up—including non-Vardda communications centers. Also, the minute Kerrel picks it up he'll be able to center us and come in on our beam. So make it fast!"

Edri nodded, glancing nervously at Trehearne. Quorn made the last dial setting, and then spoke harshly into the transmitter.

"G-One! G-One! Emergency. Request

clearance all channels. Use your recorders! G-One, clear all channels. . . ."

Edri drew an unsteady breath and leaned forward, and spoke rapidly. "I may not have time to repeat. We have found the ship of Orthis. We have found the ship of Orthis. Here follow the formulae for the Vardda mutation."

IT was as short as that. He began to read from the notebook, going fast but taking pains to make each syllable clear beyond doubt.

Quorn hung tensely over his dials. Trehearne sat motionless. His muscles quivered. Sweat ran into his eyes. Edri's voice went on.

Suddenly, Quorn's hoarse voice cried, "Hurry! Kerrel's cruiser has already picked it up and they're trying to jam us! They'll be close enough in minutes to blank us out!"

Edri's face became that of a hunted thing. His voice rose shrill, racing desperately to the last page. He started then to repeat.

"Too late—we're hanked out!" Quorn yelled. "That means Kerrel is close enough to—"

The skiff was suddenly shaken as though by a giant hand. Then it shuddered again, harder. Quorn leaped up. "Shell-bursts! Kerrel's ranging us down the canyon!"

Trehearne tried to thrust Edri's helmet over his head. Edri fought him off, clinging to the transmitter. Quorn helped pull him around.

"You're jammed anyway!" he yelled. "You're not getting through! Come on!"

Between them they got Edri's helmet on. The skiff was racked again, and something broke with a crackle of exploding glass.

Trehearne locked his own helmet. Through the audio he could hear Quorn shouting something about the airlock and getting clear. Half dragging Edri, Trehearne began to run, staggering against the bulkheads.

They reached the airlock and got it open. Out on the canyon floor light blossomed and died. Great chunks of rock struck silently against the skiff. The

deck leaped up under their feet. Trehearne saw Quorn fall outward. Then he too was pitched out of the lock, carrying Edri with him.

He hit the ground hard. He thought his helmet was broken. And then there was nothing but darkness.

When he came to the cruiser had landed close by and men in spacesuits were coming toward the skiff, carrying weapons in their hands.

Trehearne got to his feet. The moving beams of the belt lamps showed him faces inside the glassite helmets. One of them belonged to Kerrel. It came toward him and looked at Edri, motionless on the ground, and at Quorn, crawling on hands and knees.

It said, "I ought to kill you all."

Trehearne became aware of a smaller figure in a spacesuit, a figure that carried no weapon and had the face of Shairn inside the glassite. He heard her voice crying through the audio, "Michael, are you all right?" And then, bitterly, "Oh, Michael, you fool!"

Kerrel turned. He said furiously, "I told you to stay in the cruiser."

She answered, "I'm not under your orders, Kerrel—not yet."

Men entered the skiff to search it. Other men picked up Quorn and Edri and carried them away. Kerrel looked at Trehearne and gestured with his long weapon that was like a gun.

"Walk ahead of me, Trehearne."

Trehearne began to walk ahead of Kerrel and Shairn. It was dark in the canyon, whose walls cut off the galactic light. He could hardly see the cruiser he was going toward. But the beam of Kerrel's belt-lamp was squarely upon him. The skin of his back crawled.

"You'll get this one cheap, Kerrel," said Trehearne. "You won't even have to promise the price of a ship."

"Do your talking when you get aboard," said Kerrel. "Go on."

"What about the *Mirrim*?"

"We overhauled her," Kerrel answered. "Your friends are all safely under hatches. Keep going, Trehearne. Don't try any tricks."

The surface was rough underfoot

Trehearne was still groggy and the light beam swung, making a shifting pattern of whiteness and black shadow. He stumbled and went to his hands and knees.

"Ah," said Kerrel's voice, with infinite satisfaction. "A clear attempt to escape."

SHAIRN'S voice gasped out, "No, Kerrel!"

Trehearne swung around, clawing at the frozen surface. Shairn was clinging to Kerrel's arm. He struck her twice with his free arm. Then, raging, he raised his knee and drove it to knock her back.

Trehearne slammed solidly against Kerrel's turning body. He got both hands on the long weapon. Kerrel was cursing Shairn in a low hard undertone.

Trehearne wrenched the weapon away from Kerrel. He raised it like a club and brought it down on the gleaming crown of the helmet. He brought it down hard. A lot went into that blow, a lot of memories.

The glassite cracked.

Kerrel had time to scream, just once.

Trehearne dropped the weapon. Men came running toward him. Shairn had risen to her feet again. She came and stood against him so that the men would not fire. Trehearne looked down at the ghastly face inside the riven helmet. He shivered and turned away.

Shairn was saying over and over, "Kerrel tried to murder him. There was no escape attempt. I'll swear to it."

The men pulled her away and gathered around Trehearne. One of them said, "This isn't going to help you much, killing an agent of the Council." He turned on Shairn. He was a tired man. "All right!" he shouted. "We're not going to do anything! You can tell your story when you get to Llyrdis." He gave Trehearne a shove. "Get on, there."

Trehearne plodded on to the cruiser. He was put into a locked room with Edri and Quorn and Joris and two other men from the *Mirzim*. Edri was still dazed. Joris looked at them. He was an old man, centuries old, but hope lived in

him still.

"Did you do it?" he cried. "Did you find the ship?"

Trehearne said, "We found it." He turned to Quorn. He reached out and caught him by the wrists and asked, "Did we do it? Did we get the message through?"

Quorn's mouth trembled. "I think there's a chance we did. Kerrel's jamming came in on us so fast. But I think . . ."

He suddenly wrenched his hands away, his face agonized. "How do I know if we got through? Oh God, how do I know?"

CHAPTER XVII

Galactic Man

THE voyage was ending. They had known from the long period of deceleration that it was ending, and now the last pressures, and the small, grinding shocks as the cruiser settled into its dock, told them that they were again on Llyrdis.

The bells rang, and the throb of the generators gave way to an unfamiliar silence. They waited, then. And nothing happened. The hours went by and nothing happened.

Trehearne said finally, "They're not even going to remove us from the cruiser. They'll take us off to wherever we're bound for without even hearing us."

Edri shook his head. "No. Vardda law sentences no man without formal trial."

They could see nothing, hear nothing. Until, at last, the door of the room was unlocked. There were officers and guards—many guards, all of them armed. Their faces told nothing.

"You will come with us," said the young captain of guards soberly.

"Where?" demanded Joris. "To Llyrdis prison or—"

"All communication with the prisoners forbidden," clipped the young captain. "You will come with us."

It seemed strange to Trehearne to walk again on unmoving floors, corridors, decks—on a planet.

The tawny glare of Aldebaran was dazzling when they filed out of the cruiser. The air seemed unnaturally damp, heavy with the salt tang of the sea.

He and Joris and Edri, the first to emerge, looked around with a throb of eagerness, of half-hope. They could not see much. The cruiser had landed in a closed-off sector and there were other guards waiting out here beside a number of ultra-cars.

But Trehearne could hear. He could hear all the usual hum and din and clangor of the vast spaceport, the grind of cranes and rumble of trams, the scream of a fast planet-flyer coming in. And then the *whoosh* of a great bulk hurtling upward, a star-ship outbound for distant suns. And in the distance the shining towers of Llyrdis city still magnificently challenged the heavens.

Trehearne felt a sick sense of futility. All this vast ordered turmoil of routine and activity, all the galaxy-wide trade that centered here, the thousand-year solidity of Vardda commercial monopoly—how could he have dreamed that a pitifully faint and aborted radio call could ever shake it? The faces of his friends showed him how their last hope had begun to wane.

"The cars," said the young captain. "You four go in the first one."

Edri found his voice. "What about Arrin?"

"I am permitted to tell you that your comrade has been removed to the hospital and is in good condition."

Joris said nothing. Trehearne saw his sunken eyes looking across the spaceport and thought how it must be for him to come back so to this place where for years he had sat with his hands guiding the Vardda ships that came and went.

The car took them out of the spaceport fast. Trehearne saw that other cars, with guards alone in them, ran unobtrusively along ahead of and behind them.

And nothing was changed in Llyrdis. The peacock city preened itself beneath

the sun, iridescent, splendid, its streets thronged with the smiling Vardda and the other stranger races—echoing with music, brilliant with color.

They passed a Vardda man and girl who stood, laughing as they talked. It was then that Trehearne ceased altogether to hope.

"We're going to the Council Hall," Edri said presently.

Joris nodded somberly. "I could have told you that. As a Council member, I have to be formally impeached and removed before charges against me can be pressed."

He added grimly, "Old Ristin, the chairman, won't weep over that. We tangled pretty often, in the past."

The Council Hall sat amid a crowded nexus of governmental buildings. It dominated Llyrdis, not by size, but by age. It was a gray old pile, without beauty but with the massiveness and solidity of eternal things.

Its courts and corridors and staring officials Trehearne saw only vaguely. They slid over his vision, and nothing seemed entirely tangible until, in an anteroom, Shairn's face leaped real to his eyes.

She had been waiting to see him pass, he knew. Her face was white and strained, and she said nothing, but her eyes said, "*Michael! Michael!*"

He looked back at her as they went on and he wondered what she read in his own eyes. And then they had entered the deliberative chamber itself.

IT was not large and not crowded—a half-moon-shaped hall with something more than a hundred Vardda in its chairs. Of the blur of faces turned toward him, most were grave, some curious, some open in their hatred.

Ristin, the chairman, was a magnificent white-haired old Lucifer who disdained the petty vanity of pretending that this was a routine matter.

"This Council is not a judicial body," he said. "This criminal charge against you—piracy, resisting of authority, murder—will be handled by the regular courts. We are here investigating a mat-

ter urgent to the state."

"As for murder—" Trehearne began savagely but the chairman interrupted.

"I said the criminal charges will be examined later. The lady Shairn has already made her deposition, I understand. But what concerns us here is the much graver offense against the Vardda community."

Joris got up, thrusting his gray head forward like an old mastiff's. He growled, "Since this is an investigation, you can't legally carry it out without hearing us."

Ristin said grimly, "The Coordinator of the Port was always good at making himself heard. But you will have to wait this time, Joris." He looked up at the watching Vardda faces as he added, "The problem of your personal offense is not foremost. What concerns us most urgently is the general policy to be adopted by the Council."

Trehearne hardly heard. That glimpse of Shairn had done things to him and his mind was far away. He wondered vaguely why Edri, who had sat sagging heavily beside him, suddenly stiffened, why Edri convulsively grasped his wrist.

Ristin was continuing, "Therefore I emphasize again that we of the Council must not let any emotion of resentment sway our judgment. We are elected to serve the best interests of the Vardda as a whole and we must let no other considerations affect our decision."

Then Joris laughed. His head came up, and his bellowing laughter echoed and re-echoed from the vaulted roof. He swung around to Trehearne and Edri and Quorn, and his eyes were blazing now. "By God, you did it after all!"

Trehearne, still only half understanding, felt a white-hot thrill. Edri had begun to tremble violently.

Ristin's cool voice cut in. "Believe me, your exultation is premature. Nevertheless there is no purpose in concealing the fact that your actions have presented us with an unprecedentedly grave problem."

Quorn said hoarsely to Trehearne, "Don't you get it? Our message went through!"

Trehearne understood then. The gravity of the watching faces, the bitter hatred in some of them, the strong leadership the old chairman was wielding to conquer the crisis—all these belied the everyday appearance of Llyrdis that had been the death-knell of his hopes.

Through them, after a thousand years, the voice of Orthhis had spoken to the Galaxy. And it had been heard—somewhere it had been heard.

Ristin was saying, "So far only vague rumor and hearsay is abroad. Every operator who might have heard the broadcast has been warned not to repeat it but there are bound to be Orthists among them. The fact that non-Vardda worlds possess ultra-wave receivers for use in their commerce with us is an even more serious matter.

"It stands thus—that in spite of the news-services cooperation with us on the matter it is slowly becoming public knowledge that Orthhis' secret was found and broadcast. At least three recordings of it have been found and two written copies. We can assume that there are more."

Joris said grimly, "In other words—the secret is out and everyone will soon know that—and what are you going to do about it?"

"The Coordinator of the Port has summed it up," Ristin agreed, coolly. "What shall we do about it?"

A tall Vardda leaped up and cried, "I suggest that the first thing we do is to execute these traitors!"

There was a fierce chorus of agreement from a few dozen voices. Ristin rapped sharply for order.

"I have reminded you that our paramount consideration is the ultimate best interests of our people! Let us have no more such outbreaks."

An older Vardda man rose in the tiers and said quietly, "Before I advance my suggestion I should admit that I have always had secret Orthist sympathies. I don't think that I am the only one here. You must allow for that."

He went on, "I would have liked long ago to see this unnatural monopoly ended. Now our hand has been forced. I

suggest that our best and wisest course is to act at once—to declare publicly that we Vardda are going to give the secret to the whole galaxy.

"The secret is out anyway. But by acting quickly we can take credit for it. We can aver that the broadcast was made with our consent. Remember, in a few generations other worlds will be flying the stars—and we do not want them cherishing a legacy of hatred for us then!"

Trehearne, listening, smiled grimly. "Politics don't change much across the Galaxy."

"But it's all we hoped for!" Edri whispered. "It would work too."

DISCUSSION, angry debate, had sprung up. It went on and on, passionate voices accusing and denying, Ristin sternly maintaining order, bringing back the argument to the main issue time after time. Finally, in a lull of the disputing voices, Joris swung around and faced the Council.

"Now listen to me," the old man roared. "You'd think the way some of you talk that this meant the end of the Vardda, the end of Llyrdia, the end of everything. That's utter asininity."

"In the first place mutations don't take place overnight. It will be a generation or two before the other races start going out between the stars in any numbers."

Trehearne saw that sink home. The Vardda Council, being human, could not worry too deeply for long about a future they wouldn't see.

"And furthermore," Joris bellowed, "when every half-baked folk in the Galaxy does take to starflight, does that mean the great Vardda trade is ruined forever? Listen! We Vardda were the first to go out to the stars. *The first!* Do you think all the lubberly races of the galaxy can compete with us out there? Do you think so?"

He caught them with that, with the Vardda pride, the Vardda glory. Trehearne saw the strained faces changing. Not all of them but many.

Joris paused before he said his final

word. "Do you think there will ever be a time when we Vardda can't hold our own?"

There was not much talk after that. There were questions, protests, doubts, but little more argument. All the arguments had been spoken.

"We have to decide this now or never," Ristin told them. "If we delay longer there will not be a choice."

Trehearne heard the resolution read and the voting and the result. Not easily could the Vardda yield! Forty-three voted against the resolution. But seventy-nine for it.

Ristin said, "It will be announced by general broadcast tonight that, in view of the advance of civilization on many star-worlds, the Vardda deem the time ripe to share the secret of mutation with other selected races."

Quorn said, "It's done. Trehearne, it's done."

Trehearne still could not quite grasp that that simple statement marked a change forever in the Galaxy, that with it all human races began the great change toward Galactic Man.

"And these criminals who forced us to do the thing?" demanded a Vardda recalcitrant, glaring at Trehearne and his fellows.

"We have no choice there," Ristin said dryly. "To punish them for what they did would belie our own announcement. The ordinary charges against them can be dismissed. The murder charge has already been refuted by the lady Shairn."

"So that for their crime they go unpunished?"

Ristin sighed regretfully. "The interests of the state demand it. Yes."

Trehearne's comrades were breaking down, half stunned, half incredulous of the victory they had thought beyond them. But strangely Trehearne was not thinking of what they had won for the galaxy races. He was feeling a pride that Joris' phrase "We Vardda" had kindled in him.

"*We Vardda—*"

And he was one of them. He was one of the star-lords, the first, the oldest,

the greatest of the starmen.

Edri was thinking of something else. He had stepped forward amid the general clamor to speak to Ristin. "There is one more thing. Orthis—"

"A cruiser has been sent to guard his ship," said Ristin.

Edri nodded painfully. "But Orthis was not ever child of a planet. He was star-born, dwelling always between the stars. He has sat long on that far world. If his ship could take space again . . ."

Ristin said musingly, "A good thought. By putting that ship into an orbit around our system we'll create a monument that will remind all the Galaxy that it was a Vardda who gave them star-flight."

Edri turned to Trebearne and Joris. He said, "Ortis is coming home."

It was then that he began to cry.

THE message left for Trebearne had told him simply that Shairn would be at the Silver Tower. It was handed him when they finally emerged from the Council chamber. Joris got him a car and driver. Trebearne hesitated, suddenly hating to part from the old man. Edri, and Quorn and the others had their eager plans. But Joris took no joy in their victory.

"Had it been done a generation ago my son would be a star-captain now," he muttered, in answer to Trebearne's awkward words. "Well—"

The car took him out of Llyrdis, smooth and fast, and the great flare of Aldebaran sank toward the sea and dusk came on. He saw the Silver Tower glimmering in the twilight and the dark figure down on the shadowy beach and he went toward Shairn.

He put out his arms toward her but she held him off. She spoke to him steadily, her face a white blur in the

dusk. "Let us have no hidden things between us, Michael. I want you to know. I hate you for what you have done to the Vardda. I will always hate you for that."

He was astounded, all the firm hopes he had built up dissolving beneath him. Shairn went on. "But I love you, Michael—for everything else."

He had her in his arms then, all doubts gone. He said presently, "You'll get over that resentment, Shairn."

"No, Michael. It will always be there. I warn you of that now!"

Life with Shairn would be no haven of peace, but he was not afraid. He knew that he was not the man for too much peace.

They walked slowly back together toward the Silver Tower. The stars were burgeoning and Trebearne looked up at them. He looked at the far faint spark of little Sol and thought of Earth and of a changeling born there who had by miracle won his way home.

That green and distant Earth knew nothing yet of the battle fought and won beyond the edges of the Galaxy. But it had been Earth's battle too and she would know in time. Even to Earth, when a generation had passed, the starships would begin to go openly. And with their internecine conflicts past, her young men too would go out among the stars to join the great march of Galactic Man.

And who could say where that march might not lead them? To other galaxies, other island continents of suns . . .

Trebearne's thoughts became lost in the immensities of the future. He shook his head and smiled and brought Shairn closer to him in the circle of his arm. They climbed the last of the steep path in the gathering dark and the Silver Tower took them in

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NEXT ISSUE

LETTERS OF FIRE

Hollywood Goes All-Out for Atomic Space Writing

A Short Novel by MATT LEE

Earthmen No More

A Captain Future Novelet
By EDMOND HAMILTON

CHAPTER I *The Awakening*

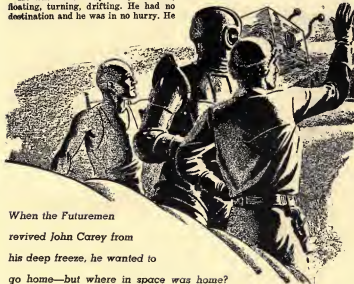
STILL and cold in its lightless vault of bone, the brain stirred feebly. Slowly, slowly, it began to wake and remember—timeless memories, flowing across it in a dark inchoate tide from nowhere into nothingness.

He was alone in space. Quite alone, floating, turning, drifting. He had no destination and he was in no hurry. He

had lost the Sun and the planets. There were not even any stars.

He did not worry. The dead do not insist on stars. He had forgotten how he came to die and he was glad.

After a long while, far distant in the



When the Futuremen

revived John Carey from

his deep freeze, he wanted to

go home—but where in space was home?



"Take it easy," Curt Newton told them. "You are in no danger"

infinite night, he saw a tiny gleam. He regarded it without curiosity or fear and then he realized that some inexorable current had caught him and was sweeping him toward the light, hurling him at it in a swift relentless rush. He knew that he did not want to go to it—but there was no escape.

The little point of light leaped and spread into a sun, a nova, a shattering glare. Terror overcame him. He clawed at the comforting darkness as it fled past but he could not hold onto it and it seemed to him that he could hear the

small thin shrieking of his body against the void as it was sucked into the devouring brilliance.

There was a face between him and the light, huge and awesome. He cried out but no sound came and then it was gone, the light, the face, even himself, swallowed up in the quiet night.

Memories—the aloneness, the remembering, the timeless drift. A sound like the rustle of far-off surf that booped louder and louder and became a voice speaking out of the heavens, saying, "Wake up, John Carey! Wake up!"

And he thought he answered, "But I am dead."

How had he come to die?

MEMORIES, groping, uncertain, coming faster, clearer, clothed in vivid color. A girl's face, a girl's red mouth saying, "Don't go. Don't go if you love me. You'll never come back."

Men and a ship—a little ship, a frail and tiny craft, it seemed, for the long way it was going and the high dreams it had: Hard-faced iron-handed men, braver than angels and more hungry than they were brave, hungry for new worlds and the unknown things that lay beyond the mountains of the Moon, beyond the still canals of Mars, beyond the glittering deadly Belt.

He remembered now the men and the ship, how they had gambled their lives against glory and lost. "We shot the Asteroids," he muttered, in the silence of his mind. "Jupiter was there ahead of us, a big golden apple almost in our hands. I remember how the moons looked, swarming like bees around it. I remember . . ."

The meteor—the tearing agony of metal, the last glimpse of horror in the ship before the air-burst took him with it into space, through the riven pilot-dome. The brief, bitter knowledge that this was death.

"Dead," he said again. "I'm dead."

The strange voice answered, "If you want to you can live again."

He thought about that. He thought about it for a long time in the darkness. To live again—the light and the warmth, the hunger and pain and hope, the wanting, the being able to want. He thought and he was not sure and then at last he whispered, "How? Tell me *how!*"

"Open your eyes and come back, back where the light is. You were here before, don't you remember? Open your eyes, John Carey!"

He did or thought he did and there was nothing but mist, heavy darkling clouds of it. Far, far away he saw the gleam of light beyond him and he tried to grope toward it but the mists were very thick.

"I can't," he moaned. "I'm lost."

Lost forever, in darkness and cold.

"Come back!" cried the voice strongly. "Come back and live!"

He heard the sound of a hand striking smartly against flesh. After a while he felt it. That little sharp pain somehow managed to bridge a colossal gulf and make him aware that he had a body.

His brain oriented itself with a dizzying lunge. The mists tore away. He woke.

It was a full awakening. The exploding nova resolved itself into a light-tube, glowing against a low ceiling of metal. The countenance that had loomed so hugely above him became the face of a man. A lean face, deeply bronzed with the unmistakable burn of space, topped with red hair and set with two level grey eyes that looked straight into Carey's and made him feel somehow safe and unafraid.

"Lie still," said the red-haired man. "Get your breath. There's no hurry." He turned aside and his hands, very strong but delicate of touch, busied themselves with a vial and a gleaming needle.

Carey lay still. For the moment he had not the strength to do anything else. The room was small. It was fitted as a laboratory, incredibly compact, and many of the objects that his wandering gaze passed over were strange to him.

One of these objects was a small cubical case of semi-translucent metal, resting on a table. The surface nearest Carey was fitted with twin lenses and a disc, so that it bore an unsettling resemblance to a face. Carey thought vaguely that it must be some sort of a communicator.

Suddenly he said, "I'm in a ship."

The red-haired man smiled. "How can you tell? We're in free fall."

"I can tell." Carey tried to struggle up. "But there are no ships beyond the Belt! How . . ." Then he began to tremble violently. "Listen," he said to the stranger. "Listen, I was killed, trying to reach Jupiter. A meteor hit us and I was blown clear, out into space with no armor. I'm dead. I'm a dead man. I . . ."

"Steady on," said the red-haired man.

"Easy." He set the needle into a place already swabbed on Carey's naked arm. Carey flinched. He sobbed a little and then the trembling quieted.

"I was dead," he whispered, again.

"No," said the red-haired stranger. "Not really dead. What we call the space-death isn't true death but cold shock—an instantaneous stoppage of all life processes. There's no time for deterioration or cellular damage, no pos-

It was only then that it penetrated Carey's stunned mind, the phrase that had been used so casually a moment before.

"You said, 'In my time,'" he repeated. "How long . . ." He stopped. His mouth was dry. He tried again, forcing out the words that did not wish to be spoken. "How long was I asleep out there?"

The man who called himself Curt Newton hesitated, then asked, "What



CAPTAIN FUTURE

sibility of decay. The organism stops short. It can, by certain means, be started going again."

He looked thoughtfully down at Carey and added, "Many lives are restored that way, lives that would have been considered ended in your time."

Carey said numbly, "Then you found me, floating in space, in frozen sleep? You—revived me?"

"Yes. Space law requires that any ship-wreckage encountered on radar must be investigated. That's how we found you." The stranger smiled. "Welcome back to life, Carey. My name is Curt Newton."

year was it when you met disaster, Carey?"

"It was nineteen ninety-one. It was June, nineteen ninety-one, when we left Earth."

Newton reached for a calendar pad, held it up. He did not speak and there was pity in his eyes.

Carey saw the date on it, and at first it was too incredible to touch him. "Oh, no," he said. "Not all that time, all those generations. No, it's not true."

"It is."

"But it can't be . . ." His voice trailed off. The numbers on the pad, the awful sum of years, blurred and darkened be-

fore him. Once more he began to tremble and this time it was for fear of life, not of death. "Why did you bring me back?" he whispered. "I have no place here. I'm still a dead man."

ABRUPTLY, from beyond the closed bulkhead door, there came the sound of footsteps. Strange steps, ponderous and clanking, as though someone enormously heavy walked in metal boots. Curt Newton turned his head sharply.

"Grag!" he called. "Hold on there. Wait!"

The footsteps hesitated and a voice from beyond the door said mockingly, "I told you so. What do you want to do, frighten the poor chap out of his wits?" The voice had a peculiar soft sibilance of tone.

It was answered by a rumbling metallic growl, an utterly unhuman sound, that seemed to have words in it. Carey got up. He clung to the edge of the surgeon's table, fighting the weakness that was on him, his eyes fixed on the bulkhead door.

"Carey," said Curt Newton, "things have changed and science has come a long way. There are three others aboard this ship besides myself. They're not—well, not quite human, as men of your day understood the term. Even now, in our time, they're unique, created by techniques far beyond the general knowledge. But you must not be afraid of them. They're my friends and will be yours."

A chill came over Carey, creeping into his bones. He continued to stare at the door. What waited behind it, what monstrous things—not quite human, not quite human. The words repeated themselves in his brain, scuttling across it like spiders spinning icy webs, tightening until he could barely hear Newton's voice talking on.

"Robot . . ." Faintly the voice came and Carey stared at the door. The drops of sweat ran slowly down his face. "Robot, human in intelligence, created by scientific genius . . ."

There were sounds behind the door. There were presences not of the flesh.

Carey's mouth was dry with the taste of fear.

". . . android, human in all respects but created also in the laboratory . . ."

Carey began to move toward the door. What dreadful facet of the future had he been cast into? What uncanny children of this undreamed-of age were lurking there behind that panel? He could not bear to know but somehow not knowing was worse. Not knowing and wondering and thinking . . .

". . . the brain of a great scientist, a human, kept alive for many years in a special case . . ."

Robot, android, living brain. A red-haired man and a date on a calendar. A ship where there are no ships, a life where there is no living. A dream, Carey—a dream you're dreaming, drifting along with the endless tides, the dark night tides beyond the Belt. Open the door, Carey. What difference in a dream?

A human figure, lithe and graceful, whose face had the unhappy beauty of a faun, green-eyed and mocking. And beside it a shape, a towering gigantic manlike form built all of gleaming metal. A shape that bent toward him, reaching out its dreadful arms, glaring at him with two round, flashing eyes.

A harsh, toneless voice spoke close behind Carey, saying, "Catch him, Curtis."

Carey looked for the source of the strange voice. The cubical box that he had taken for a communicator had risen from its shelf, hovering upon tenuous beams. And he saw that the surface with the twin lenses and the disc was indeed a face.

"No," said Carey. "Don't touch me. Don't any of you touch me."

He made his way back into the little laboratory. The room had closed in on him. The darkening air pressed against him like water. He was conscious that his hands were cold, that his feet were very heavy, treading on a surface he could no longer feel.

"I tried to soften the shock for him," Curt Newton was saying somewhere across the universe.

And the harsh voice of the cubical metal case replied without inflection, "Poor fellow, he has many shocks in store."

Carey sat down. He put his face between his cold palms, and the knowledge came to him, the truth that he had not quite believed before but from which now there was no escape.

He had bridged the gulf of time. He had left his own past in the dust of centuries behind him and he stood face to face with a future that was beyond his knowing. He was brother to Lazarus, come forth into an alien world.

CHAPTER II

Return from Space

HE could hear them talking. He did not want to hear them. He did not want to lift his head and see them again. He did not even want to be alive. But he could not help hearing.

Grag's booming voice, the thunderous voice of the robot. "I didn't know, when I fished him out of that wreckage, that he had been floating there so long!"

The harsh inflexible voice of the metal box, of the brain who had once been Simon Wright, a scientist of Earth. "A long time indeed," said Simon Wright and added slowly, "He is old, this man—almost as old as space-flight."

The soft sibilance of the android, at once cruel and compassionate. "It was no kindness to bring this one back, Curt. He's as much alone in the world as we are."

There was something in the attitude of these three unhuman strangers that struck Carey suddenly. It was a strange thing, for one who had for all his life been merely a man named John Carey, of no particular importance to anyone but himself. It was awe. And that realization brought another with it—that John Carey was a creature as queer and unreal to these beings of the future as they were to him.



GRAG

Curt Newton said to the android, "I think you're wrong, Otho. I think any man with guts enough to buck the Belt in those old tin skyrockets would rather live, even in an unknown time, than sleep eternity away."

Carey did not answer that. He did not know the answer.

"He creates a problem for us, Curtis," said Simon Wright. "And at a time when we have a grave problem of our own. You understand that."

"Yes." Curt Newton went and stood in front of Carey and spoke his name. Carey looked up.

"I want you to know one thing," said Newton. "You're not alone, not without friends. You'll stay with us until you're oriented. After that—well, we have a certain amount of influence and we'll see that you get a start on whatever sort of life you may choose."

Still Carey did not answer.

"Listen," said Newton. "You were a pioneer. Why you were or what you wanted out of it I don't know. But whatever it was you were trying to push the frontiers back so you could get it. Well, you succeeded, you and others like you. Even in failure, you succeeded."

"There are colonies on the farthest

mons. Men have even begun to reach out to the worlds of other stars. You helped to make all that possible, Carey, and you're alive to see it. Isn't that enough to make you want to live? Aren't you curious to see the civilization you helped to build?"

Carey smiled faintly. "Psychotherapy," he said. "We had it in my day and it wasn't any more subtle. All right, Newton. I'll be curious as hell when I have time to think about it. Meanwhile I'm alive—so I don't really have any choice, do I?"

He got up. Deliberately he forced himself to look at Grag and Otho and Simon Wright.

"All right," he said to them all, to no one. "I'll get used to it in time. A man can get used to anything if he has time."

"Quite," said the voice of Simon Wright. "All of us have learned the truth of that—even Curtia."

Carey tried in the period that followed. But it was a hard thing to do. To his own time-sense the great gap between yesterday and today was only an instant of sleep. He caught himself often thinking of Earth as he knew it, of the men and women who would be there just as he had left them, of the songs and the streets and the faces of buildings, the uncountable small details that make up the sum of an epoch.

It was hard to teach himself that they were there no more. But one or another of his shipmates was always near him and never let things get too bad. So gradually, from constant association, Grag and Otho and Simon Wright became familiar to Carey and he no longer felt that uncanny twinge when he was near them.

Simon remained enigmatic and remote, an intelligence keen and brilliant far beyond Carey's power to understand, wrapped in his own thoughts, his own researches. Knowledge was Simon's thirst and his existence and it seemed to Carey that, although Simon Wright had been a man of Earth before his brain was taken from his dying body and preserved by the magic of a future

science, Simon had become the least human of them all.

Grag and Otho were easier. The android was so nearly human that only now and again did a flicker of something other-worldly in his green eyes remind Carey that Otho was not as other men. Even then it was impossible to feel any horror of him. Carey had known a lot of mothers' sons but seldom one that he liked as much as the sharp-tongued ironic Otho, whose most pointed barbs were tempered with pity.

As for Grag, once Carey had got used to his seven-foot clanking bulk and enormous strength, he became fond of the great robot, whose only faults were over-enthusiasm and a certain lack of judgment. It was, however, constantly upsetting to Carey to realize that this lumbering metal giant had quite as much intelligence as he and a good deal more knowledge.

The man Curt Newton, the man many called Captain Future, remained paradoxically the most difficult to understand of all the four. It was only bit by bit from the others that Carey picked up Newton's story—his strange birth and stranger upbringing in a lonely laboratory hidden under the surface of the Moon, an orphan with no other companions than the three who were called the Futuremen.

NO wonder, Carey thought, that with such a background Newton was withdrawn and guarded in his approach to the ordinary relationships of men. He, like his companions—and like Carey too in this new incarnation of his—was set apart forever from the normal world. Carey sensed that the easy casual manner of the red-haired man had been painfully acquired, that beneath it lay a dark and solitary creature, much better not aroused.

Carey soon discovered something else about Curt Newton. He was angry and it was no mere passing rage. It was a cold black fury that rode him all across the spatial gulf that plunged between Saturn, whence he had come, and Earth, where he was going. And the cause of it

was a message he had received from a man named Ezra Gurney about another man named Lowther.

There was something about a monopoly on a certain kind of fuel, which was going to put Lowther in control of all shipping to and from the distant star-colonies, which were not much at present but would grow. It seemed that the star-ships took on their high-potential fuel for the long jump at Pluto, where the radioactive ore was mined and refined.

And now, by devious manipulations of hidden stock, Lowther had got control of the refining companies and raised the price out of reach. There were ships stranded at Pluto and men in an ugly mood and Newton was heading fast for Earth to see what he could do about it.

It sounded a dirty enough deal and Carey hoped that Newton would bring Lowther to time. But this talk of star-colonies and star-ships was beyond him. His mind was still thinking of Jupiter as the unattained and well-nigh unattainable. Any problems of star-ships or the men who flew them were distant and unreal. Furthermore he was too deeply immured in his own fears and loneliness, in the strangeness of being alive.

He began to think more and more of Earth. He was hungry to see it, to feel it under his feet again, to look up into a blue sky at the familiar Sun. He had been long away from Earth when he fell asleep—an eternity, it had seemed, shut up in an iron coffin outbound for Jupiter.

He remembered now how they had talked about Earth, crouching within the narrow walls that hid them from the black negation of space. The voices still rang in his ears, the faces were as clear as though he had only turned his head away for a moment or two.

Craddock and Szandor, Miles and Delaporte, Gaines, Coletti, Fenner—the red-headed, the black and the fair—the different particular tricks of phrase and expression, the kindness and cruelty and courage and fear—the wisdom and the folly, moulded together into the separate forms of men. And they had talked of Earth.

They had planned what they would do when they got back, with the wealth of a new world in their hands. They had talked of the women who would be waiting for them, of the parades and the speeches, the fame that would be theirs around the globe. They had talked and all the time the darkness that was just beyond the hull had been listening with a silent mirth and John Carey was the only one who would ever come back again.

As the ship rushed nearer to the orbit of Earth Carey's eagerness increased until it was like a fever in him. He talked of home as those other men had talked and Curt Newton listened with a kind of pity in his eyes.

"Don't expect too much," he said. "It's changed—but it's still Earth, not Paradise."

The forward jets were cut in and the ship quivered to the brake-blasts—not the anguished uncertain shuddering of the ships Carey had known but a controlled lessening of speed. The green remembered world came gleaming across the forward port and Carey stared at it, sitting motionless and absorbed, urging the misty continents into shape, watching the oceans spread into blueness and the mountains rise and become real.

Suddenly he was afraid. He covered his face with his hands, and said, "I can't. I can't walk like a ghost through streets I never saw, looking for people who have been dead for generations."

"It won't be easy," said Curt Newton. "But you'll have to. Until you do you'll be living and thinking in the past." He looked at Carey, half smiling. "After all, you came into this world a stranger once before."

"What will they say to me?" whispered Carey. "How do people talk to a dead man?"

"As rudely as they do to everyone else. And how will they know unless you tell them? Come on, Carey, stiffen up. Forget the past. Start thinking about the future."

"Future!" said Carey and the word had a strange hollow sound to him.

"Give me time. I haven't caught up with the present yet."

He was silent after that. Newton asked for and got clearance for a landing. The ship picked up her pattern and spiraled in.

Nothing was clear to Carey. Confused vistas reeled and spun beneath him, a huge monster of a city, the many-colored patchwork of a spaceport, strange and unknown, yet with a haunting familiarity, like a language learned in childhood and long forgotten. His heart pounded fiercely. It was hard to breathe.

The ship touched ground. And John Carey had come home from space.

He remained as he was, sitting still, his fingers sunk deep into the padded arms of the recoil-chair. Curt's Newton's voice was faint and far away. "Simon and I are going to Government Center. Grag will stay with the ship. But Otho can go along with you if you like."

"No," said Carey. "No thanks—I . . ." There was more he wanted to say but he could not form the words. He got up and went past the others, seeing them only as shadows. The airlock was open. He went out.

THE blaze of a summer sun smote hard upon him. He looked up at white clouds piling slowly in the sky and thought out of some dim coign of memory, *Later there will be a storm.* He began to walk across the concrete apron, scarred with many flames.

This was the same spaceport. It had to be for there was the city before him and behind him was the sea. Here, from a little field that had looked so big and grand, the *Victrix* had taken flight for Jupiter. Here a girl had said goodbye and kissed him with the bitterness of tears.

But it was not the same. The little field was swallowed up and gone, drowned in the mighty rows of docks. Where the administration building had stood a white pylon towered up into the clouds. The air was filled with the thunderous roar of ships, landing, taking off, jets flaming, lean hulls flashing in the sun.

Great cranes clanked and rumbled. Strings of lorries snorted back and forth between the freight docks and the warehouses and from beyond them spoke the anvil voices of the foundries. Atomic welders blazed like little suns and the huge red tenders rolled ponderously among the ships with their loads of fuel.

Carey walked slowly. He was listening to the music, the titan song of the ships and the men who served them. Good music to one who had first helped to write it long ago. He listened and was proud—not just for himself but for Gaines and Coletti, Fenner and Miles and Szandor, the men of his crew and all the other crews who had christened this port in their blood and flame.

And suddenly the song was drowned in the chattering voices of women. People surged around him, caught him up and carried him on toward a great sleek craft of silvery metal, with a name and an unknown flag on her bow—*Empress of Mars*. Trim young men in natty uniforms stood by her gangplank. High heels clicked against the curving metal with a sound as shrill as the voices.

"Such a wretched cruise the last time! I was simply bored to tears. . . ."

"Well, Mars isn't what it used to be, so overrun with tourists. I went last to Ganymede for a change and you have no idea. . . ."

A young girl, giggling—"It's my first trip and I'm just thrilled to death. Janet said they have a simply heavenly orchestra on this ship!"

Under the shrill incessant chatter lay the heavier intermittent voices of men. Rich men, stuffed with the tallow of good living, men with big sweating bellies sheathed in silk, comparing the food and service on the *Empress* with the *Morning Star*, that flew the luxury run to Venus, and the *Royal Jove*. And here and there among them an anxious younger man with a red-mouthed woman on his arm, underlings stripped to their last nickel for the privilege of rubbing shoulders with the elite on a trip across space.

A sickness came over Carey. He felt

smothered in perfume and smug sophistication. He looked at the trim young officers and hated them.

Over the chatter and the cries an annunciator spoke with firm politeness. "Last warning for *Empress of Mars* passengers! The gangways close in six minutes. Last warning. . . ."

Carey stood, a silent unnoticed figure in the crowd, thinking of other ships and other men who had left Earth long ago, and the sickness in him deepened. Caught in the press of soft comfortable flesh he heard gongs clanging and a surge of voices and then the sibilant roar that became a purring thunder as a glistening fabric of shining metal lifted skyward. Then he was swept away in the backwash of people from the empty dock.

"She really earned a nice vacation. . . ."

". . . and those cruise-ships are so much more fun than ordinary space-trips. They have hostesses and games and always something to do!"

Carey stumbled out of the stream at last into a little deserted backwater around a tall pillar that stood at the edge of the spaceport.

There was gold lettering on it, only a little dingy from the back-blast of many ships. Carey saw a name he knew.

He looked closer. It was a tall pillar and he had to look high to see the legend that read, TO THE PIONEERS OF SPACE.

Now he saw. Underneath that legend were names, and dates. First the names of the great trail-blazers.

Gorham Johnson—Mark Carew—Jan Wenzl—

Wenzl . . . Once a small boy had watched with worshipping eyes as a grizzled one-armed man stumped toward a ridiculous rocket-ship.

A little farther down, not much. *Lane Fenner—Etienne Delaporte—William Gaines—*yes, all the *Vietrix* crew including John Carey, all with the golden stars beside them that meant *Lost in Space*.

Names—names and men, his friends, his shipmates, his rivals. Jim Hardee, the kid who had sat drinking with him

the night before he hit for Jupiter. While he had lain dead in space young Hardee had gone on, doing the big things he dreamed of. And now, like the others, he was only a dingy gold-letter name on a forgotten monument.

The voice of the annunciator pleaded monotonously, "Will *Pallas* passengers please report at once to Dock Forty-four? Will *Pallas* passengers . . ."

Old Wenzl and Jim Hardee and young Szandor and Red Miles—yes, and he himself, bucking the black emptiness and the cold death to push the frontiers out . . .

"Attention, please," said the mechanical voice. "The liner *Star of Venus* will land at Dock Fourteen at exactly sixteen. Those wishing to greet incoming passengers . . ."

Carey sat down on the steps of the monument. Otho found him there, staring at the bright crowds going back and forth, listening to the voices and the laughter, the swift proud thunder of the ships.

Otho touched his shoulder and after a while Carey asked him tonelessly, "Did we die for this?"

CHAPTER III

Men of Earth

FOR the better part of two days Curt Newton was busy carrying his fight against Lowther into one Government office after another. And during that time, with Otho determinedly sticking to him to keep him out of trouble, Carey wandered about in the city.

It was very large. It had always been so—the largest city on the world of Earth. Now it was no longer merely large but monstrous, bloated, towering, spreading, gorged with humanity and wealth. Yet it seemed less crowded than Carey remembered.

The buildings were taller now, frighteningly tall, and there were covered walks of chrome and glassite spanning

the dizzy canyons in between, so that a man might go across the city and never touch the ground. Traffic ran on many levels underneath. The streets were quiet and clean and Carey missed the brawling taxicabs, the surge and hum of crowds.

He watched the people who passed him. The tempo had slowed since the days he knew. Men and women strolled now, where before they had almost run. Their faces were a little different too, more relaxed and satisfied. He did not think that they were much happier or wiser, certainly no more kind.

Men and women, well fed, well dressed, making money, spending it. Palaces of entertainment, offering elaborate amusements to suit every taste. Travel bureaus displaying their three-dimensional *living posters*, urging people no longer to visit Quaint Brittany or the Romantic Caribbean but luring them instead with the ancient Martian cities and the pleasure-domes of tropical Venus.

Shop windows, full of marvels. Tenuous spider-silks from Venus, necklaces of Martian rubies like drops of blood to glow against white flesh, jugs of curious wines from the moons of Jupiter, the splendid furs of beasts that hunt across the frozen polar seas of Neptune.

We opened the way, Carey thought. *We died and they grow fat.*

Stone and steel and plastic and rare metals to make the giant towers splendid. Soft colors, soft sounds of music from garden terraces far above, where the sea wind tempered the heat and set the fronds of other-worldly shrubs to rustling.

Terraces where people sat feeding on delicacies brought across space in fleets of special ships, watching languidly the musicians and the dancers who were as alien as the exotic plants. Everywhere was the pervading softness, the silk-wrapped cushioned luxury, the certain ease of men who have never had to fight.

"You might as well see it all," said Otho. And so Carey visited the places of amusement, the parks and the pleasure gardens, and sat upon the perfumed

terraces, a dark and somb're shadow among the hutterfly crowds. And often the women turned and looked at him as though perhaps they saw in his face a thing that was lost out of the men they knew.

Every landmark was gone, every place he knew was changed. There was no single street that he remembered. And the names were gone too and the faces, gone and utterly forgotten.

Suddenly Carey glanced up at the overtopping spires that leaned against the sky and said, "I hate this place. I'm going back to the ship."

Otho smiled a little wryly and they returned to the port.

Curt Newton came back almost as soon as they. Simon was with him and a grizzled leathery-faced man in uniform who was introduced to Carey as Ezra Gurney.

Otho studied Newton's face. "I was going to ask you how it went," he said, "but I see—it didn't go at all."

Newton shook his head. "No." He flung himself down, retreating into a brooding silence. Carey saw his hard dangerous anger.

"What happened?" demanded Grog. "You don't mean to say they're going to let Lowther get away with it?"

"There doesn't seem to be any way they can stop him," said Ezra Gurney. He had a hard honest space-worn look about him that Carey liked. He too was angry.

"The trouble is," he explained, "that Curt has no proof against Lowther. There's a half dozen refining companies on Pluto and they've all raised their fuel-prices together. Lowther only owns one of them outright and in the open.

"He says and they all say that mining and refinery costs have gone up so that they have to charge more for the fuel, which is legal enough. All right. Now we know that Lowther has used dummy corporations and juggled stock and so on until he actually controls the other five companies. But we can't prove it!

"Curt went to everybody at Government Center. They all said the same thing. Such a charge would require hear-

ings, committees, investigation, all that rubbish—weeks, months, maybe years, because Lowther is smart enough and rich enough to stall indefinitely and the chances of nailing him are mighty slim."

"And in the meantime," said Curt Newton slowly, "the star-men are forced either to sell out to Lowther for fuel or to stay here in the System while their wives and families and the communities they've worked so hard to build go without the supplies they need.

"They'll give in, of course, because they have to go back—and Lowther will gain a stranglehold on all the trade between the System and the colonies. In twenty years he'll be rich enough to buy and sell the Sun."

Grag held out his two great metal hands and looked at them, flexing the fingers with an ominous small clanking of the joints. "I vote," he said, "that we pay this Lowther a visit."

"What form of execution would you prefer?" Otho asked him. "Being melted down for scrap or converted into a nice useful boiler? There's a law against killing people, even for hucket-headed robots."

"Who said anything about killing?" boomed Grag. "He could have an accident, couldn't he?"

"Preferably a bad one," grunted Ezra. "But I'm afraid that approach won't do."

"No," said Curt slowly, "but I think Grag has the right idea at that. I think we ought to go and talk to Mr. Lowther." He sprang up. "Come on, Carey, this will interest you as a commentary on the brave new world you helped to build!"

"I think I've seen enough of it," Carey said. "I don't want to see any more."

BUT he went with them. Only Simon Wright stayed in the ship. They took a car from the spaceport. Except that it had wheels and seats it bore little resemblance to the cars Carey had known. Propulsion units sent it rushing smoothly along the underground highways.

By the time they came out onto the

great elevated boulevards that led across suburb and country the long summer dusk was falling. Carey turned and looked back. Outlined against the deep blue the enormous hulk of the city blazed with many-colored light. Even at this distance it had an alien look to his eyes.

The sleek suburban areas fled by. Beyond them the country still pretended to be as it had been. But Carey's more primitive eyes detected the deception. Artful hands had arranged the trees and changed the courses of the brooks and pruned the wild hedgerows into pleasing vistas.

The car left the highway and proceeded along a private road. Presently, upon a slope ahead, Carey saw a graceful structure of metal and glass, shaped by a master hand to fit like a huge synthetic jewel into its setting of terraced gardens.

The translucent walls gleamed softly and strains of music drifted on the evening air. The gardens were full of fairy lights. As they came closer Carey made out the flutter of women's skirts among the flowers, heard the sounds of laughter.

"Looks like a party," said Otho. "A big one."

"We'll give him a party," rumbled Grag and cracked his metal knuckles.

They came to the gates, which were artistic but highly functional. Curt Newton got out. He went to the small viewer that was housed at one side and pressed the communicator stud. After a moment Carey saw him returning to the car.

"Mr. Lowther is engaged and can see no one," he quoted and then added, "Particularly us." He surveyed the gates. "An electronic locking device, operated by remote control or with a light-key—neither of which helps us. Grag, would you care to see what you can do about it?"

Grag's photo-electric eyes gleamed as he heaved himself out of the car and strode toward the gates. For a minute his enormous hulk was motionless, leaning forward a little with his hands on the bars, testing the resistance. Then he

moved. There was a groaning and snapping and a metallic squeal and the gates were open.

The car drove on into the grounds. "There was an alarm on the gate, of course," said Newton. "They'll be waiting for us and I don't want any trouble. We had better get out here and go 'round through the gardens."

The air was heavy with the scent of flowers. It was warm and on the terraces the white shoulders of women turned back the moonbeams. The music ran slow and lilting and there was laughter under the colored lights. Curt Newton walked through the gardens and after him came Graig and Otho and John Carey, who was moving in an unreal dream.

One by one the dancing couples saw them and the laughter stopped. The swirling skirts were still and the faces watched them, not with fear but with an amazement, as children might look at sombre strangers invading their nursery. The music continued, soft and sweet.

Along the paths between the drooping jasmine and the great pale blooms of Venus, across the terraces, through a sliding wall wide open to the night, and into a pastel room with a vast expanse of mirror-like floor surrounded by graceful colonnades—and here too the dancers drew back from the intruders.

Then, from one of the archways, came a group of men headed by a tall man no older than Curt Newton. He wore a dress tunic of black silk and his hair was black and his face had a clear healthy pallor. Carey thought that it was the sort of skin a woman might have, shaped smooth over handsome bones and set with wide dark eyes. Only there was nothing womanish about Lowther's face if by womanish you meant weak or pitying or possessing any softness of heart.

The men with him were of a type Carey knew and detested. They were the kind who are always somewhere around a man like Lowther.

The two groups came to a halt and eyed each other. Lowther said, "If you

came to say something, say it and get out."

Newton put one hand on Carey's shoulder and pointed with the other to Lowther. "There he is, Carey—the most important man in the Solar System. Oh, the System doesn't know it yet but he is. And he's modest too. He owns all the refineries on Pluto but you'd never know it to look at the records."

He had raised his voice a bit so that it could be heard clearly above the music. A considerable crowd had collected, drawn in from the gardens, and there were plenty to hear.

LOWTHER came closer to Newton. He started to speak and Newton went on smoothly, politely, drowning him out. "My friend has been away from Earth for a long time, Mr. Lowther. I wanted him to meet you, so that he could see the type of man we produce now, the successful man. I thought it might teach him a lesson while he's still young enough to profit by it.

"You see where you made your mistake, Carey? You went pioneering, and got nothing out of it but hardship and danger and sudden death. You should have stayed at home like Mr. Lowther here, using your wits and letting others do the dirty work of opening up new worlds. See what you'd have had—a fine house, a host of friends, a good steady business with no competition?"

"After awhile, with patience and good judgment, you'd have owned the shipping-lines to which at first you only sold fuel. Doesn't it make you ashamed, Carey, to think of how you wasted your youth—just as the star-men stranded out there on Pluto are wasting theirs?"

Lowther's face was even whiter than before except for two streaks of dull red along his cheekbones. "Listen," he said, "if you're so worried about the star-men, you'd better get word to them to watch their step or they'll be in real trouble.

"They're threatening to resort to violence and I'm leaving for Pluto in the morning to see that my property is protected. I don't know exactly what you're

trying to do, Newton, but even you can't back the law—and neither can your friends."

Newton's face was tight and dark but his voice was soft. "There are laws and laws," he said. "Some of them are so basic they haven't even been written down. Perhaps someday soon we'll have a longer talk about laws."

He turned abruptly and went back down the long room with the glassy floor and the others went with him. Lowther followed them at a distance, looking after them as they left the grounds.

In the car, speeding back toward the city, Grag said regretfully, "Why didn't you let me wring his neck?"

"He may get it wrong yet out on Pluto," answered Curt. "When the star-men there find out that I couldn't do anything for them they'll try to do something for themselves." He turned suddenly to Carey. There was a hard reckless glint in his eyes.

"Carey," he said, "do you want to come with us out to Pluto and see a fight?"

Carey shrugged heavily. "Pluto, Antares—what difference does it make where I am? Yes, I'll go. I'll go anywhere that isn't Earth."

He was sick with Earth and opulence and the greedy faces of men. The old horizons were gone and even Pluto, that distant stepchild of the Sun, was the seat of monopoly and all the ugly things that had plagued mankind since the beginning. But it would be a change from Earth.

Otho said to Curt, "You're not really going to egg them on to fight?" He said it not with reproof but with hope.

Curt answered grimly, "No. They'd only get themselves killed without accomplishing anything. Lowther was right. As of now the law is all on his side."

He was silent and then he said, "No, it was another kind of fight I had in mind."

He said nothing more, until they reached the spaceport. Then he grinned at Carey, a grin without much humor

in it. "I know what you need," he said. "Grag, go on back to the ship and keep Simon company. Otho and I will help Carey drown his sorrows."

Grag went off. Newton and Otho took Carey some distance around the periphery of the port. There was an endless number of joints along the fringe, some of them fashionable, some catering to ordinary spacehands. They entered one of the latter. There were a bar and booths and tables and Carey thought dully that this at least had not changed.

They sat down. Through the window, which looked out on the flash and thunder of the port, Carey could see the rows of docks and the long sheds with the names on them of this and that line or company. One of them said **LOWTHER MINING CORPORATION** and there was a sleek ship in its dock with an endless conveyor taking cases of supplies up its gangway.

"Lowther's ship, getting ready to take him off to Pluto tomorrow," said Newton harshly.

Otho raised his glass toward it. "Confusion to it," he said.

Newton moodily watched the distant ship. Carey felt the unfamiliar liquor explode in him like liquid fire. Otho signaled and presently there was another glass in Carey's hand.

He was in no mood to refuse it. He had been a long, long time in space, his awakening had been hard, his homecoming bitter. The future was a cold and formless presence, crouched behind a dark curtain.

Carey drank.

There was an interval wherein he knew that he talked but was not sure what he said. Then he found himself in cool night air and Otho's arm was helping him into a ship.

Even through his haze, Carey knew Simon Wright's toneless voice by now. "Where is Curtis?" it demanded.

"He'll be along," Otho said easily. "This way, Carey—you need sleep."

It was later—how much later he could not guess—when Carey half-roused to voices. Simon's inflectionless voice and Curt's.

"—and you won't tell me what you've been up to?" Simon was saying.

"There's nothing to tell, Simon. We got nowhere with Lowther so we came back. Now we've got to go out to Pluto and see if we can stop him there."

"Curtis, I know you and I know that you have done something. Well, we shall see. But one thing I am sure of and that is that someday your anger will outrun your wisdom and bring you to disaster.

Carey drifted into sleep again. He did not even rouse to the shock of take-off. When he woke, the ship was on its way to Pluto.

CHAPTER IV

Earthmen No More

THEY made the long sweeping curve to escape the pull of Neptune and ranged in toward the dim speck that was Pluto. The jumping-off place of the Solar System, with nothing beyond it but interstellar space, riding its dark cold orbit around a Sun so distant that it seemed no greater than the other stars.

Yet even here, if wealth was hidden away, man would find it. Carey thought that undoubtedly a few shrewd souls would have set up concessions for mining coal in Hell.

He had watched all the way out from Earth but with only a flicker of the excitement he would once have known. He was interested, of course, because it was his first trip beyond the orbit of Jupiter. But the thrill was gone. People talked of going out to Saturn or Uranus now as they had once talked of going out to California. It gave Carey, somehow, a feeling of having been cheated. In his day going to Mars had been a big thing and fraught with danger.

From a featureless fleck of reflected light almost too faint to be seen Pluto grew into a recognizable world—a dark world with black wild mountains shooting up against the stars and eerie seas

of ice. There was something so cruel and ghostlike in the look of it that Carey could not repress a shudder.

It seemed rather like an invader from outer space than a member of the familiar System, the more so since in bulk and mass and composition it bore a ghastly resemblance to Earth as though alien demons might have made it as a joke.

They were a little ahead of Lowther. They had not had much start on him but they had a faster ship.

"We'll have a little time," said Curt. "Even a few hours might be enough to talk some sense into Burke and the others."

Burke, Carey gathered, was captain of one of the two star-ships fighting the battle over fuel, was more or less the leader of both crews.

"They counted on help from the Government," said Otho. "When they find out what's happened they're going to be hard to hold."

"We've got to hold them," Curt answered grimly. "They'll blow their only chance if they start fighting."

Simon said nothing but his lens-like eyes followed Curt intently. The forward jets began to thunder and the Comet, still curving, entered its long arc of deceleration.

As they swept closer Carey saw that the frozen plains were pocked with craters, and that some of the mountain-peaks had been shattered by caroming meteors. The lunar desolation of the world was hideous. Carey thought what it must be like to live and work here.

"The refinery men get relief at regular intervals," Curt told him. "And there are a couple of small domed cities around on the other side."

Carey nodded. "Even so Pluto seems a stiff place for them."

"It is," said Curt. "You'll see."

The televisior buzzed. They had been coming in on the automatic beam but now somebody wanted to talk to them. Curt opened the switch.

A man's face appeared on the little screen. It wore the expression of one who has been handed a hot wire and

doesn't know how to let go of it. "Lowther Mines speaking," it said. "Identify yourself."

Newton did and the man's face grew more unhappy. "We can't very well stop you from landing," he said. "But keep your distance from the domes—no closer than a hundred yards. There's a charged barrier." He added, "We're well armed."

The screen went dark. Curt shook his head. "They're all set for trouble. Let's hope it hasn't already started."

Curt set the *Comet* down at last, on the edge of a vast white plain where it struck against a mountain wall. Carey saw two great dark hulls looming near them with only their mooring lights showing. Well over a hundred yards away, sunk into the living rock of the cliffs so that only the outer bulwarks showed, was a series of steel-and-concrete domes.

Northward along the plain, in a sector marked off by beacons to warn away incoming ships, were other domes. Here there were rifts and gouges in the barren rock of Pluto, hulks of strange machinery and structures of various sorts whose uses Carey could not be sure of.

Occasional lights gleamed but nothing moved. The diggers and the ore-carriers were still and no clouds of vapor came from the buried stacks of the refineries.

"They're shut down tight," said Curt. "Regular state of siege." He looked at the others. "Don't forget what our friend said about the barrier."

They put on protective coveralls—except for Grag and Simon, who needed no such protection. Curt had handed Carey one of the suits. "You've come all the way out and you might as well see the fun," he said.

Then they went out into the black Plutonian night toward the star-ships. It was intensely dark, colder than anything Carey remembered except that one split-second touch of open space.

Carey stared at the distant mockery of a Sun, overcome with the feeling that he was indeed on the outer edge of the universe. He was so occupied by his sensations that he was taken completely

by surprise when men rose suddenly out of the hollows of the ice and closed around them.

A torchbeam flashed out and struck Curt full in the face. He said, "Burke?" and from beyond the light a voice grunted, "Okay, relax. It's him."

"What's the idea?" Curt demanded.

"Well," said Burke, "we picked up your call but we wanted to be sure it really was you and not one of Lowther's smart tricks."

"Or," said Curt, "did you hope maybe it was Lowther himself, trying to get behind the barrier before you knew who he was?" He glanced around at the shadow-shapes of the men, who were numerous and armed.

"Maybe," said Burke. He switched the beam around the Futuremen and onto Carey. "Who's this?"

"He's not Lowther either. His name is Carey and he's a friend of mine."

Burke nodded briefly. His attention returned to Newton. "What's the news? What did they say on Earth?"

"Let's go on to your ship," said Curt. "I'll tell you about it there."

Burke and the others must have known from the way he said it what the answer was going to be. But they turned silently and went back across the ice with the Futuremen and Carey into their ship.

They had the port shutters down but there was light inside. It felt very warm to Carey after the spatial chill. They stripped off their heavy garments and went aft into the main cabin, sorting themselves out so that the officers of both star-ships sat down around the battered table and the crews crowded where they could in the passageways to listen.

CAREY stood unnoticed in a corner of the cabin. He could see these starmen now. They had large scarred hands and faces burned dark as old leather. Their uniform jumpers were worn and their boots were shabby and they wore their greasy caps in a certain way that Carey remembered. He saw the sort of eyes they had too—and those

he remembered also.

Burke leaned forward across the table. He had an oblong face that was mostly bone and sinew like the rest of him and a hungry look around the mouth. "All right," he said. "Now tell us."

Curt Newton told them and as he talked Carey watched the star-men. An eerie feeling crept over him that he had known these men before. He had served with them in the little ships that fought their way along the planetary roads that seemed then so long and hard. It was strange to see these men again, to know that they still lived. He could almost have called them by name except that their faces had altered a bit and he could not be sure.

Burke was talking. "If they won't do anything we'll have to do it ourselves. And we will! I'm not going to sell our ship to that pirate for a load of fuel."

Curt said, "The law—"

"To blazes with the law! When it starts protecting thieves instead of honest men it's time to forget the law."

There was no cheering or loud talk. There was only a harsh mutter of assent.

"Listen," Curt said. "You can't smash into the domes and take the fuel. You know what they've got ready for you."

"We don't have to smash in," said Burke. "Lowther's on his way here. We intercepted his message saying so. Well, he can't land behind the harrier. There isn't room."

Curt nodded. "The same thing you pulled with me. Get Lowther in your hands . . ."

"And kill him, if we have to," Burke finished quietly. "But we'll get our fuel."

For the first time Simon spoke. "That is murder."

Burke shrugged. "They'll have to come a long way to catch us." He added in a sudden fury, "Murder, is it? We've got our wives and families out there! They need the medicines, the tools, the seeds. What if they die for want of them? Isn't that murder too?"

Simon said, "If you kill Lowther you can never come back for more."

Curt had got to his feet. He was about

to speak. Then Carey heard a voice clamoring over the annunciator, crying, "Radar room! We've just picked up Lowther's ship! He's still in free fall but he's coming!"

Carey saw the fierce excitement that took the star-men. There was a sudden wolfish shouting, a ringing of boots on the deck-plates. Burke was yelling orders. The men in the passageways began to move.

Burke faced Curt Newton. "Well?"

Curt said, "Hold your men back."

There was a tenseness about him now. It seemed to Carey that he was listening for something. "Hold them back!"

Burke's face hardened. "I couldn't if I wanted to." He added slowly and meaningly, "They'll trample anybody that gets in their way."

He turned his back on Newton then and for a time nothing more was said or done. They listened to the voice of the radar man, calling out the position of Lowther's ship. The voice became more and more puzzled.

Simon's lens-like eyes were fixed intently on Curt Newton.

"He's still in free fall," said the radar man. "He hasn't started his curve yet and the indicators don't show any rockets."

Burke put his mouth close to the speaker-grid. "Communications," he said. "Are you getting anything from Lowther's ship?"

The answer came back, "No. The Company station is calling Lowther but he doesn't answer. It's like he hasn't any power."

"Still no rockets," said the radar man. "I can't figure this one. He's way past his point of approach and going wide."

"Still no signals," put in Communications. "He doesn't answer."

"Going wide—" The voice of the radar man reached a tight pitch of excitement. "He's lost his landing-curve! He's heading right out into space with no rockets!"

For some odd reason Curt Newton seemed to relax. But Burke and the other officers stared at each other with dawning comprehension and then with

a joy that was more savage than their anger.

"He's out of fuel," said Burke. "Nothing else would kill both his rockets and communications. He's out of fuel and heading right out into the stars in free fall with no power."

He began to walk back and forth with short steps as though he could not bear to be still. His hands gripped fiercely at the air. "We don't have to kill him now. It's done and not a finger laid on him. And it's better—better! He'll learn before he dies. He'll learn what it means to be between the stars with no fuel!"

Curt Newton turned sharply toward the door.

Simon glided before him. "Curtis," he said, "this is your doing."

Curt said quietly, "Get out of my way, Simon. I'm going after him."

Burke heard. So did the others. Carey saw them move toward Newton.

"What do you mean—going after him?" cried Burke.

"There are other men in that ship besides Lowther. There's no reason why they should die."

"Ob no," said Burke softly. "You're not going to bring him back."

Carey saw them closing in around Newton and he pushed in to stand with Otho beside the red-haired man.

"Listen," said Newton. "I've fought for you. I'm still fighting for you. Are you going to trust me or aren't you?"

Burke's glance wavered before his. But he said, "It don't make sense to bring him back."

"Let him go," said Simon Wright slowly. "He has done this thing for you. Now let him finish it."

UNCERTAINLY, reluctantly, Burke stepped aside and Curt Newton went out of the star-ship with Carey and Otho and Simon Wright.

Not until the Comet was rising up from Pluto on a jet of flame, rushing out into the vast darkness where Lowther's helpless ship was gone, did Simon speak again. He asked tonelessly, "How did you do it, Curtis?"

Newton shrugged but would not meet

his gaze. "There's a certain chemical, you know, a pinch of which can kill a whole tank of ship-fuel. An anti-catalytic. Well, that night before we left Earth, I slipped into Lowther's ship and used it to kill his Number Six, Seven and Eight fuel-tanks."

He shrugged again. "One to Five would take him out around Neptune, I knew. But then he'd run out and couldn't curve in toward Pluto."

"But why?" Carey asked puzzledly. "Why do it and then save him?"

Simon said, "I can guess why. But I tell you, Curtis, even if you succeed it was harebrained. Once in the past your rashness made outlaws of us four. It could happen again."

No more was said until Curt Newton's masterful piloting brought the Comet at last alongside the dark silent ship that was steadily falling toward infinity. The emergency locks were coupled together with magnetic grapples. Curt and Otho were armed and Grag stood behind them like an iron colossus, guarding the narrow passage.

The locks were opened and Curt stood facing Lowther. Watching from the background Carey caught a glimpse of Lowther's face, ugly with fear, with hatred.

"I might have known it would be you," he said to Curt Newton. "You caused our fuel to go dead. How you did it I don't know but—"

"You can't prove that," said Newton. He spoke to the men who were crowding behind Lowther. "Take it easy," he told them. "You're in no danger."

A ray of hope crept into Lowther's eyes. "You're going to take us back?"

"Well," said Newton, "I can't tow you for my stern-grapples aren't working. And my ship is small. I could take off your officers and crew but I'm afraid there wouldn't be any room for you."

Lowther thought about that. Carey could see it in his face—the visualization of his ship plunging on and on into the great deeps with him alone in it.

"You couldn't do that," he whispered.

"I wouldn't have any choice," said Newton.

Carey saw Lowther's face whiten and crumble until it was hardly human. Then Newton said, "However, I might sell you fuel to get back to Pluto."

Shrewd and biting even through the terror Lowther's eyes fastened on him. "Now we're getting to it," he muttered. "All right, what's the price?"

"As you know," said Curt, "fuel is very high these days. But I'm not out for profit. You sign over all rights in all your Pluto mines and refineries to a Government foundation, for the furtherance of travel and exploration among the stars. And I'll let you have a bunker full."

Something like a smile touched Lowther's mouth. He smothered it at once, beginning to protest and threaten, but Curt shook his head. "Oh, no," he said. "There will be no repudiation of this deal later on when you're safe on Pluto. You're going to make out a full confession of your activities in gaining control of the five other companies. It will be kept in a safe place. And just to make doubly sure . . ."

Here he pointed to a fat-joweled little man behind Lowther's shoulder—a man whom Carey recognized as one of the group who had been with Lowther that other time on Earth.

". . . to make doubly sure," Curt was saying, "you will go into another cabin and write out a separate confession. As Lowther's secretary you know every angle of that deal because you helped him. And if the two confessions don't match I will know that someone is lying—and that will be two people there won't be room for in my ship."

He turned again to Lowther and waited. Three different times Carey saw Lowther start to speak, and give it up. At last he made a gesture of defeat and Curt motioned him into the *Comet*. The secretary whimpered once and disappeared.

Less than an hour later, Curt Newton had the signed irrevocable papers and Lowther had his fuel.

* * * * *

Time had passed. The two great ships on the white plain of Pluto were readying for take-off. Rock and ice quivered to the deep hum of great generators running on test. Men were feverishly busy around the gangways.

Carey came hastening across the ice to where Newton and the Futuremen were watching. And as he ran he felt buoyantly and fully alive for the first time since his strange awakening.

"I'm going with them!" he cried. "I talked to Burke. He signed me on and I'm going with them—out to the stars!"

Otho laughed and said to Newton, "You were right about him."

Suddenly Carey understood. He said, "That's why you brought me out here with you? You knew!"

The red-haired man nodded. "I knew that only out on the edge, out on the frontier, would you find your own kind again."

Newton paused and added, "You're not the only one, Carey. I've seen it happen over and over again to spacemen in my own time. They go out young and eager, dreaming and talking of how someday they'll come back to Earth with wealth and glory and live there happy the rest of their lives. And when they come back they find they can't do it, they find they're Earthmen no more."

"Earthmen no more," Carey repeated, wonderingly. "Why, yes. That was it, of course. It wasn't Earth that changed so much. It was me."

From the distance, amplified by an annunciator loudspeaker, roared Burke's voice. "Time to lift, starmen!"

And Carey, slipping and hurrying, went back across the frozen plain, toward the ships and stars that waited.

●
NEXT ISSUE

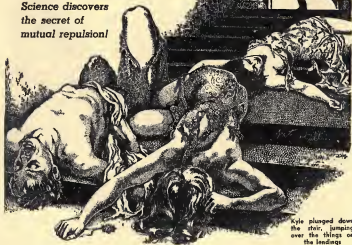
BIRTHPLACE OF CREATION

Another Captain Future Novolet by EDMOND HAMILTON

Then Fly Our GREETINGS

by
MARGARET ST. CLAIR

*Science discovers
the secret of
mutual repulsion!*



Kyle plunged down the stair, jumping over the things on the landings

KYLE sat in a pool of light. The rest of the dim room glittered with gold braid. He felt a little hysterical. He said, "I'm sorry, gentlemen, but I don't see the bearing of your questions. I don't believe it could possibly be used as a weapon."

"Never mind that," the cool voice said. Kyle could not see any of their

faces distinctly. "That is our problem, not yours. But can we take it that the description here"—he tapped the copy of the March issue of *Scientia Nova*, which lay before him on the long table—"is substantially correct?"

"Yes, sir. As far as it goes."

"I must say I'm disappointed, gentlemen," an older voice broke in. "I had

understood the effect was to make them fight. They don't fight?"

Kyle was not sure who had spoken. He turned to face the direction from which he thought the voice had come. "No, sir. I don't think it would be possible to make the animals fight. You see, in order to fight they'd have to come into contact and that's just what they don't want to do.

"The effect is not to cause hostility but a strong, really a very strong mutual repulsion. They behave like—like bodies with the same electrical charge."

"A moment ago you said the account in the magazine was correct as far as it went," said the cool voice. "Do you mean that you have made additional experiments since? Have you tried your invention on the higher animals?"

"It's not an invention—I beg your pardon, sir. But I myself have as yet no clear idea how the effects are produced. Yes; I have made a number of experiments with mammals, including three rhesus monkeys."

A ripple of excitement ran along the shadowy table. "And what was the result?" the cool voice asked.

"I got no result at all with the lower frequencies, the frequencies to which the lizards had responded. Higher frequencies, had the usual effect. I don't want to generalize without more data but it looks as if there might be a relationship between the frequencies to which an animal would respond and the degree of its cortical development."

Somebody cleared his throat. The elderly voice said, "You mean you got the monkeys to fight?"

"No, sir, they didn't fight. What they did was break open the cage. I still don't know how they managed it—it was reinforced steel mesh. One of the monkeys stayed in the cage. I found another at the end of the laboratory, as far from the cage as she could get.

"The third monkey, the one we called Rita, got out of the lab somehow. She must have hurt herself doing it—there was considerable bleeding. I don't know where she went. I haven't been able to locate her yet."

A LOW-PITCHED hum of talk broke out. Kyle, shutting his eyes against the flood of light that fell around his chair—the only bright light in the big room—thought he could make out a word now and then.

"The public . . . opinion . . . no opposition . . . humane." He thought he heard the last word over and over again.

A voice Kyle had not heard before, a voice with great authority, said, "Can Mr. Kyle tell us whether this mutual repulsion is permanent?"

Kyle opened his eyes, blinking. "Until two days ago, sir," he said, "I should not have been able to answer the question. But on Thursday I observed that the phase of repulsion had been succeeded in the guinea pigs by an anti-phase in which the social instincts were considerably exaggerated. When one of them was taken away from the group it showed marked distress and attempted to bite."

"Most interesting," said the authoritative voice. "That removes the final objection, to my mind."

"Of course," said Kyle, forgetting his instructions, which had been to speak only when he was addressed, "I can't say how long this anti-phase may last or what might succeed it."

Several people cleared their throats. The cool voice said, "You may go now, Mr. Kyle."

Kyle got to his feet. He was stiff from nervous tension and fatigue. As he approached the door the agents who had brought him to the Nonagon fell in on either side of him.

When they were outside the door the taller agent said, "You're to go with us, Kyle. We'll take you to your new lah."

* * * * *

She loved them, Vinnie thought, she just loved all of them. How right Father Glorious had been! Love was the golden key that unlocked the heart of each and every one of God's creatures.

What had the white lady on the second floor in millinery said this morning? Something about how Vinnie was the little girl with the big friendly smile.

That was a nice thing to think about. If you loved people they'd never hurt you. It just went to show.

"Watch your step, please watch your step," Vinnie said, opening the elevator door with her thin brown hand. She tried to put the love abounding Father Glorious was always talking about into her voice.

Her back did hurt but you oughtn't to let material things bother you—Father said so. Besides, it was closing time for the store. She'd only have to make one or two more trips today. "Watch your step," Vinnie sang, "please watch your step!"

She closed the door and started back to the third floor for more passengers.

car, as far from each other as they could get. Was something going to happen, something terrible—an earthquake, a hurricane?

The elevator reached the mezzanine. Vinnie opened the door. "Watch your step, please," she said, her voice coming out higher than she had intended it. "Please wa—" her voice broke off.

She felt a sensation so strong that it was translated into an emotion instantly. It was intenser than anything she had yet experienced in her eighteen years. For a moment she was a jelly of confusion and bewilderment. Who was—what—what? Her mind swayed like a balancing toy. Then it righted itself.

"Get out," she said to her passengers.

Weapons of Destruction



IT'S a safe bet that every one of us alive at present is pondering the intense search for more "efficient" weapons with which too many of our ablest creative brains are occupied at present. Since Hiroshima, the vision of a lethally volatile peach-colored mushroom-shaped cloud has overshadowed a great many billions of waking hours—and perhaps as many after dark.

But there are other, even deadlier, possibilities. Mrs. St. Clair here in "Then Fly Our Greetings," presents one that is no more improbable than the potential of hundreds of projects now operative behind the guarded doors of laboratories, not only in the United States, but virtually in every section of the so-called "civilized" world.

Nobody was going up, but plenty were coming down. They crowded into the elevator, pushing, talking, laughing, complaining. One of the little girls began to cry. Vinnie tried to radiate love-abounding out to her.

She opened the cage on second to take on two more passengers. "Please step back in the car," Vinnie said.

As the cage moved slowly downward from second to mezzanine Vinnie felt a sudden stab of pain in the back of her head. For a moment it sickened her. Her hands shook on the car's controls. She looked around her, hoping nobody had noticed it. She'd get fired if she took sick.

How white everybody was, a bleached fish-belly white! They looked like they were scared. And quiet—there wasn't a whisper in the car. Even the children were still. They all seemed to have pushed back against the walls of the

"Get out, all of you. You just get right on out." She made wide gestures with her hands.

They had begun to move, seeing the open door, before she spoke to them. They poured over the elevator sill, rubbing against the edge of the door in their reciprocal aversion, and scattered through the mezzanine. As their distance from each other increased they began to run.

VINNIE watched them incredulously. What was the matter with them, with her? Why had she spoken to them like that? She couldn't help but be fired when she'd talked to white folks like that.

She sank back against the side of the elevator car, weeping. It was hard to get a job these days. She must be crazy. What had happened? Her head ached so.

She pressed her hands against her

face and cried harder. Yes, crazy. It was terrible, terrible. What had come over her? But underneath her confusion and distress there was an indestructible kernel of another emotion. It was wonderful, it was like the peace of God Father Glorious was always talking about, not to have anybody near her. It was wonderful to be *alone* in the elevator car.

The baby had begun to cry. Tanya listened for a moment and then decided that it must be time to feed him. Where had she left the mask the nurse had given her?

She found it in a cupboard and looked at it doubtfully. It was dirty. Perhaps she ought to wash it. But the baby had a cold anyhow. What was the use of wearing it?

She approached the crib, unbuttoning her blouse.

She picked the baby up. His crying hushed.

"Little apple," she said to him, smiling. "Mama's little man."

Tanya had no warning as Vinnie had had. She felt no premonitory stab of pain in the head, nothing. The confusion burst upon her unheralded.

For an instant she stood rooted beside the cradle. The child had begun to scream at the top of his lungs, arching his small body away from her desperately. "Hush," she tried to say. "Hush, little blossom," but her lips refused to shape the words.

She wanted to scream, she wanted to jump through the window, she wanted to take a knife and kill herself. Still she remained beside the cradle, holding the shrieking child. Instinct, education, physiology, were warring with the new force in her. Her face was beaded with sweat.

Abruptly she dropped the child. He fell back on the pillows of the crib with a thump that made him stop crying for a second. Tanya looked down at him, moaning and wringing her hands. Then she began to back away from him. When she reached the door of the flat she turned and ran through it.

He kissed the tip of each finger, he put a cluster of kisses in the soft flesh of the palm. He encircled the ring finger, wearing the new gold wedding ring, with a chain of tiny kisses. He said, "*Tu m'aimes?*"

Her eyes were shining. She laid her right hand softly against his cheek. "*Francois, tu le sais . . .*"

Their lips met. Presently he said, "Take off your jacket, *cherie*. I find it an embarrassment."

She laughed. She began to unbutton the high-collared close-fitting jacket of dove colored cloth, smiling at him teasingly. She had not reached the fourth button before he took her once more in his arms.

Abruptly they drew away from each other. Her jaw dropped. She put out her hand toward him and then let it fall. He said, "I—what—Marie!"

She licked her lips. He had turned very pale. With a convulsive effort he touched her shoulder with one fingertip. She jerked away from the contact as if his hand had been red hot.

They stood staring at each other. Her hands pressed against her temples desperately. He said in a croak, "I don't understand. You are still so beautiful."

She made no answer. For a moment longer they faced each other. Then she turned and ran into the bathroom. He heard the door click as she locked it behind her. Then he too ran.

The new recruits were a very promising lot, Sergeant Ma thought. They had the short stocky well-set-up build he liked to see and they were willing. Eager for education too—they'd beamed all over their faces when he told them about the plan for the new learning. They'd soon master the thousand signs.

"Number off!" he barked at them as they formed up in a wavering line. They counted to twenty but the next man didn't know what came after it. Ma had expected the difficulty. He supplied the ensuing numbers himself. They'd soon learn. Yesterday they had

only got to seventeen.

"Right dress!" he said. Haltingly they obeyed. Yes, they were a sharp lot.

The drill continued. "At ease," Ma said finally. Gratefully they relaxed. Ma began to lecture them.

"The first duty of a soldier," he said powerfully, "is obedience. The sage tells us that 'the excellence of things is their undoing' but in a people's army excellence . . ."

He finished his talk, saying, "That is why drill is so important. From it we learn obedience. Shoulder arms! Form fours!"

With a good deal of jerky trotting the recruits moved into place. Their faces were intent and serious. His talk had done them good. They were trying harder than yesterday. "Forward march!" Ma shouted at them.

LAST week the drill ground had been a sea of mud. It would be a sea of mud again with the next rain. It was dry now. Each time the recruits' feet came down on the dry earth dust arose. Ma began to sneeze.

He pressed his finger to his upper lip to stop the sneezing. Narrowing his eyes he peered through the dust fog at the men. The bones of his face ached.

"Column right!" Ma yelled at the soldiers. The column hesitated, made the turn. Then, to Ma's stupefaction, the men began to run.

They spread out from each other in a fan-shape. They dropped their guns in the dust as they ran. One man stumbled and fell, then another. Those behind swerved away from them automatically, without touching them. Even in the midst of Ma's general astonishment, this blind avoidance appeared to him a remarkable thing.

The last of the fugitives was disappearing. "Dismissed!" Ma shouted after him, in a desperate attempt to regularize an unregularizable situation. There was no sign that he had been heard.

The dust was beginning to settle. Ma looked up wildly at the sky as if he expected to find some clue in it to what

had happened. The blue serene depths were empty. There was not even a plane.

Had he dreamed it? No, there were discarded rifles all over the drill ground. It had happened. Ma shuddered. What would happen next? Anything—anything could happen now.

* * * * *

The military mind, Kyle thought as he tried to stop his nervous shivering, the military mind tended to be an incompatible mixture of hidebound conservatism and Buck Rogers foolishness. It was like hitching a jet plane to an oxcart. And you never knew which would predominate.

The basic aim behind the research task they had set him had been laudable. To produce a truly humane weapon—yes, indeed. It was for this that he had submitted to the questioning at the end of each day's work, questioning which made him feel like an aphid being milked by ants. He'd tried hard and, besides, the problem had been interesting. So it was partly his fault.

He looked around the laboratory. The animals in the cages slept, ate or hickered unconcernedly. The rats in the corner were mating. It wasn't affecting them, that was clear.

If only the people over Kyle had waited, waited until he'd had time to test and check! But they'd been in a hurry and they hadn't had imagination enough—perhaps no one could have had—to foresee what would happen. They'd come up with *this*.

Once more Kyle tried to turn on the radio. It was no use. His physiological aversion to getting near an electrical device was still too strong to be controlled. He couldn't make himself turn the switch. It probably wouldn't have been any use, anyhow. If other people were affected by electrical devices as he was nothing could be coming over the radio.

He couldn't stop shaking. A drink might help him. He got a flask of absolute alcohol from a cupboard, poured two tablespoons into a glass and filled the glass with water to the brim. When

he took the glass from his lips it was empty. His body had wanted that drink.

The physiological craving for alcohol, the aversion to electricity, might be significant. There was something of more immediate consequence though—the weak water pressure he'd noticed when he was filling the glass. He got all the empty carboys he could find and filled them. By the time the last was corked no more water was coming from the tap.

Kyle felt better. He had almost stopped shaking. He looked at his watch, frowned, listened to it. No, it was still going. It was really only three hours since Merilee, one of his assistants, had pressed her hands to her head and then run out of the lab. The other two assistants had been out on errands. They had not come back.

"Hadn't come back" was too melodramatic. No doubt they were still reasonably safe and sound, provided the guard in the corridor with the BAR hadn't shot them. But it had been a long time since Kyle had heard a shot.

Meanwhile the question was—could he sit this one out? He had a good deal of water and though the only conventional food in the laboratory was half of the box of soda crackers Merilee had been chewing on at noon, there were the cages of lab animals. One could, Kyle supposed, eat white rats in a pinch.

If he sat tight he might be able to get along until the anti-phase set in. The rhesus monkeys had exhibited a strongly marked anti-phase. Human beings could be expected to do so too. But while he was engaged in sitting tight what would be happening to everyone?

The extent of the catastrophe was extraordinarily hard to realize. Always before, in the worst of human plights, little nodes of cooperation and unity had continued to exist. Kyle found that, while he could visualize the disjunction which was taking place immediately around him well enough, as soon as he tried to apply the principle on a wide scale his mind slipped back into its habitual expectation of organization and mutual action.

AND yet it was in the highest degree unlikely, it was surely impossible, that what was happening in Washington was an isolated case. The military had been aiming at a particular target area. The projector had been over-powered (Kyle had tried to point out this danger the last time he had been up before the Staff). The backlash from the projector had enveloped Washington. Probably most of the rest of the globe had suffered first.

It had sounded like a humane weapon. Military opposition could not exist when human beings were unable to tolerate one another's proximity. But—Kyle mixed himself another drink of stock-room alcohol and downed it avidly—the effects of the new weapon would probably turn out to be more dreadful than the plagues of the Middle Ages.

The plague fear had sent human beings fleeing wildly from one another but even in their panic they had acted by twos and threes. Affection, fidelity, self-interest, had bound them to each other. Now every man fled from every other man.

Instinctive self-preservation motivated their repulsion. Kyle had made the experiment of forcibly placing lab animals near one another after he had used his small projector on them. They had, in every case, died. And when he had dissected them he had found that gross changes had taken place in the brain itself, lesions that had been caused by this proximity.

No, he couldn't sit this one out. It was too much his fault. Though the thought of approaching one of his fellow men filled him with sickening apprehension Kyle found his social instinct was as strong as ever. Curious—it was unlikely he could help very much. But he was under an obligation to try what he could do.

Cautiously he opened the lab door. There was an immediate rattle of bullets against it. Kyle slammed the door, sweating. The BAR man was still out in the hall.

Kyle felt no animus against him. If he himself had had a gun he'd certainly

have shot at anyone who tried to come near him. But the presence of the BAR man meant that Kyle would have to get out through the window and he had always had a poor head for heights. Fortunately he was only on the fourth floor.

He started toward the opening, hesitated. On impulse he went to one of the cabinets and got a case of dissecting scalpels and lancets from it. It was getting too dark for him to read the labels on bottles but he sniffed at several until he found what he wanted, a flask with the pleasant odor of chloroform. He put the scalpels and the bottle in opposite pockets. Carefully he let himself down over the window sill.

The Nonagon building was generally admitted to be a first class eyesore. But now Kyle blessed the anonymous architect who had covered its surface with knobs, festoons, ribbons, gargoyles and acanthus leaves cast in concrete. There were plenty of hand and foot holds and if he kept his mind strictly on descending, his acrophobia could be controlled. Once or twice he felt the terrible constriction and sense of heat in his skull that told him other human beings were near.

When he was about twenty feet from the ground the concrete festooning gave out. Feel about below him as he would, his feet met nothing but a perpendicular granite surface. He'd have to drop.

He made himself relax for the fall. But when he picked himself up he found that his left ankle had been badly wrenched. When he tried to stand on it the pain was so intense it made him faint. He got out a scalpel and cut his vest into strips with it. Then he bandaged his ankle with the cloth. When he was done he could stand on the foot without too much pain.

The moon was coming up. Kyle wasn't supposed to know where the projector building was but secrets do leak out. It was a long way to walk but he couldn't bring himself to try to start a car. Shaking and sweating he began to hobble along.

He had walked for perhaps a quarter

of a mile, detouring when he sensed someone near him, when he heard the nasty *pock-pock* of bullets up ahead.

It was a man with a tommy-gun. There were two bodies on the pavement in front of him. His gun was in shadow but he seemed to be shooting in through an open window. No doubt there was somebody inside, somebody whose mere existence was an intolerable affliction for the man with the gun.

Kyle bit his lip. He could detour but the man with the gun would probably start shooting at him anyway. Also a gun would be very useful to Kyle. Was it possible that the gunner was so occupied for the nonce with extermination that Kyle could get reasonably close without being noticed? If he moved quickly? He would try.

The gunner spun about, still sparring bullets, just as Kyle threw the bottle with the chloroform.

THE bottle broke on the pavement. Kyle pressed back against the side wall as tightly as he could. The gunner could not see him, of course, but he would have a very accurate notion of where he was. Bullets began to pock and jar against the stone cornice.

The burst flagged, renewed itself, flagged again. Kyle stuck his head around the corner. The gunner was sinking drunkenly on one knee. He fired a last burst and collapsed. Kyle could smell the fumes of the chloroform from where he stood.

The pain in Kyle's skull was terrible. Apparently even an unconscious man was still a potential source of brain damage. While Kyle was stripping the gunner of gun and ammunition, he wondered whether he would ever be able to think normally again.

After he had carried his booty to a safe distance he had to rest for what seemed a long time. He collected himself at last and started hobbling toward the projector building once more.

The projector was housed in a small two-story building that had once been a local sub-station power house in a residential district. In various devices

ways the department of defense had acquired title to the ex-sub station and the buildings which stood near it.

These buildings had been boarding houses before they changed ownership and they continued to pass as boarding houses after the department of defense acquired them. But a rather strictly selected group of "boarders" lived in them.

If Kyle had got to the projector building three hours, even two hours, earlier he would have found himself in the midst of a bitter small-scale version of modern warfare. The men on whom the task of guarding the projector had devolved had managed, since they were specially selected personnel, to endure each other's proximity for almost forty seconds before they began shooting.

In their frenzy of extermination they had also used their grenades and flame throwers. But by now everything was quiet and nothing moved in the street. Kyle found that the bodies bothered him very little, even in a sentimental way.

He stood before the darkened building while a wind whipped lightly at his trouser legs, and tried to think. He had been told that the projector had its own power source and was in no way dependent on city installation.

The projector was certainly not functioning now or he would never have been able to get so near it. That was natural enough—he had found with his small projector that a twenty-second exposure had quite as much effect as one of several minutes. No doubt the big installation had been switched off immediately when the minimum period was over.

What was it he had wanted to do? Oh, yes. This week—last week—some time recently, at any rate (there seemed to be a permanent confusion inside his skull)—he had found that a certain sequence of frequencies from the projector tended to undo the "polarization" effect on the nerve cells.

At least he had observed such a reversion to normality in one of the rhesus monkeys, and microscopic examination

of the animal's brain had confirmed the observation. It wasn't much to go on, certainly. Kyle would have liked to make many more tests. But there wasn't time to make careful tests now. He'd have to try to see what he could do.

He went up to the door. To his surprise it opened easily. He stood blinking for a moment, seeking to accustom himself to the sudden darkness after the moonlight of the street outside. Presently he saw that the interior was not quite dark—there was a very dim blue glow up ahead. Almost simultaneously with his perception of the light he realized that there was a man in the building.

A bullet spat past his cheek. Kyle felt a certain surprise at the inaccuracy of the shooting. Then he saw the man's faint silhouette against the light and understood. The man had been wounded in the right shoulder. He was shooting with his left hand.

Kyle was thinking as clearly as he could. He himself didn't want to shoot if it could be avoided. He might miss and damage the projector.

He yelled, "Come out! I won't hurt you! I want to—try to—fix things up! I'm going to—stop—this mess!"

There was a second's silence, and then a new rattle of bullets from his opponent's gun. Above the noise Kyle heard the man screaming something that sounded like, "You spy! You God-damned spy!"

IT couldn't be avoided, Kyle perceived. Now that he had to act he felt a vast remote calm, like that which comes at certain stages of drunkenness. With a sensation of almost godlike detachment he took careful aim. He would hit the man in the heart.

He fired six shots. His opponent was screaming in a scratchy high-pitched voice. Each bullet went into his body with what seemed almost a petulant thud. There was a sudden bursting silence as the man went backward with the impact. Kyle lowered his gun and waited frozenly.

The man by the projector clawed him-

self into a kneeling position. He fired one last shot, not at Kyle. The slug went into the projector with a jangling crash of glass.

There was a noiseless flash of light, not very intense. Then even the dim glow went out.

Kyle groped his way through the choking darkness to the projector. He lit matches and examined it. The damage was serious. Two of the big tubes were glinting bits of glass on the pavement and the wiring had shorted in three places at least.

Was it hopeless? Not under ordinary conditions. The big tubes were special jobs but more could have been made in a week or two. The technicians who had installed the wiring could have repaired it. But the man whom Kyle had just shot was perhaps the last of the technicians, and the cooperative labor which had shaped the tubes was now unthinkable.

Unthinkable—hopeless—irreparable. The words seemed to flit about in the darkness of the building endlessly, like pairs of leathery wings. Kyle lit match after match, hoping to find something he could do for the projector, some repair, however useless, that he could make. There was nothing—he could not find anything.

Hopeless. The last match burned to his fingers. Hopeless—irreparable—unthinkable. Standing there in the darkness, weary, spent and dazed, Kyle began to weep.

* * * * *

The water in the carboy was foul, had been foul for days. It would hardly go through the filter paper any longer. There was only about an inch of it left.

He wasn't hungry. That was odd. He hadn't been hungry since the first repulsion phase. Perhaps the alcohol he had drunk—it was all gone now—had helped.

Whatever the reason Kyle had no desire for food though he had lost a good deal of weight. But he wanted a bath, he wanted to be immersed to the chin in water, generous ungrudging water, and let it soak in through his pores. He

wanted gallons and gallons of water to drink.

He'd go down to the river tonight with the carboys, he decided. As the phases alternated human beings found that the distance at which they could tolerate each other continually increased. But he still had his gun and two clips of bullets for it. He would try.

He poured the water that had seeped through the filter paper into a glass and sipped at it. It took all of his self-control to keep from gulping it. He tipped the glass vertically to get the last precious drop. When he put it down reluctantly he felt the tightness and peculiar empty feeling in his brain that told him a new anti-phase was setting in.

He hoped not. How many anti-phases would this be now, the third or the fourth? He tried to count though the events of the last month—months—whatever it was—were a meaningless jumble. It was the fourth—no, this must be anti-phase three.

He remembered the first anti-phase pretty well. He had been sitting in the lab sipping what was nearly the last of the alcohol when he'd become aware of a peace, almost a harmony, in his brain. It made him feel good. He thought for a moment that the treatment he had managed to give himself with the small projector, battery powered, had been a success.

The feeling had got stronger, turned into a hunger, a necessity. He hadn't tried to fight it when he realized it was the anti-phase. He had been glad because he had hoped the new phase might mean the beginning of a return to normality.

As if driven by some instinct they had met in the clear area where the Nonagon had parked its car. Most of the cars were still there, dust-filmed, rain-spotted, here and there a little touched with rust. There had been perhaps five hundred of the survivors. How they had clung together in their new-found amity, their aching need!

Kyle remembered most vividly from that anti-phase the woman with the silver fox stole and how she had clung

to the fat Negro woman next to her. "I love you!" she had cried, her face shining, "Oh, I love you! You're wonderful." And the Negress beaming with reciprocal affection, had answered, "Me too! Yessum, me too!"

That phase had ended.

After it there had come the new repulsion—more severe—the new anti-phase, the new repulsion. And now the new anti-phase. How he hated it!

Kyle could not resist it. He ran past the swollen bodies in the hall, down the stair, jumping over the things on the landings. He plunged down the last flight two, three steps at a time. Hurry, hurry, hurry, his brain said, hurry—you love them so.

THEY were clustered together like bats in a cavern, like bees in the wintertime. If it were possible to use this phase somehow, he thought as he plastered himself wildly against the quivering mass, use it to rebuild all that has been destroyed, to put a stop—at least—to what was still going on. Use it! But how?

They ached to get closer to each other, to be interpenetrated with each other's beings. They were straining and grunting in their communal embrace. Those at the center of the mass, Kyle thought, must be half crushed and stifled. But there were fewer than there had been in the last anti-phase. In the shaking cluster last time there must have been at least two hundred people. Now there might be eighty left.

The face of the man on Kyle's left was familiar. He might have known him once. Kyle said—not really wanting to speak, feeling as if the words had been extracted with forceps from his brain—"Isn't it wonderful being all together again? Now we're more than we were separately. We're the group."

The man opened his eyes and looked at Kyle. He had a sad lined middle-aged face. He said, "You know, this isn't like the other phases. Something new is happening. Don't you feel it? We're really going to become just one person this time, all of us, just one.

"Maybe if we try hard, that one new person can fix things. He'd be wiser than any of us separately, wouldn't he? I can't stand much more of this."

The words filled Kyle with desperate energy. He said, "Yes, yes, let's try. I'm sure you're right. We'll try. Tell the person next to you!"

The news went buzzing around the cluster, struck inward. They all heard it, they all agreed. The moments lingered, the strain increased. The man next to Kyle said at last, "Do you feel it? At the back of your skull—new circuits, a new type of consciousness?"

Kyle licked his lips. He wanted to reply. It had seemed to him as the straining moments passed that new regions, new dimensions, were opening strangely in his brain. Or was it space itself that divided in a panorama of planes which echoed one another to infinity?

It was as if explorers touched the dark continents within his skull and established cities there. And from the blank headlands now touched with light, from the tributary cities, something was flowing out toward the others and uniting with them.

Kyle had a sudden vision of a creature vaster than one of the Anakim. It stood on earth, laughing, and stretched its fingers out toward Saturn. The thin winds of heaven rustled through the flames of its hair. It was wiser, stronger, more joyous than humanity.

Was this new entity what the sad man had meant? Oh, it must be so. Surely this creation, so much greater than the sum of its creators, would yet obey them, could be impressed to do their will.

The minds of those in the group were flowing together to make something unheard of, their wills had coalesced. And what they were making would be able to solve with almost godlike ease what they had in their miserable isolation found insoluble.

The sad man's question no longer needed answering. Kyle felt his identity leaving him and for a moment he was terrified. Who was he, what would he become? He struggled. Then

he was caught up into a blazing unity. His last conscious awareness was of a prospect of gigantic delight.

* * * * *

Who was Kyle? As member after member of the group fell away, dying of exhaustion, hunger, exposure, thirst, the question could be asked. Who was Kyle?

He looked about him numbly. The air was thin and cold. His body seemed strange to him.

At the back of his dim half-burned-out brain there was a recollection of titanic splendors, of inhuman experience. He seemed to remember exertions beyond the scope of imagination, an urge which had shaken someone vaster than himself, a great, an incredible enterprise. Who was Kyle?

HE was standing in the midst of a huge plain, at the foot of a towering monolith. Without comprehension his eyes followed the shaft up, up, up, to where it seemed to split the sky. Who could have reared such a shaft? Far off on the flat horizon another towered into the heavens and at the very limit of visibility he saw still another.

It was cold, so cold. Kyle shivered uncontrollably. There was no warmth in the dim yellow sun.

Once more his eyes went up the shaft of the monolith. He looked at it blankly, slack-lipped. And slowly, little by little, that part of his brain which had not been destroyed began to understand. The monoliths . . .

There had been an anti-phase. But this time humanity had been welded together indissolubly. They could not flee from each other. They had not even

wanted to. The repulsion had taken a new direction, been transferred. Group after group over the face of the globe, their minds had flowed into each other's to become fused in a super-mind. And that mind, compelled by the wills that composed it, had built.

The human beings who composed it had been the cells of its tangible body. It had used them mercilessly. Sleepless, tireless, mindless, they had labored. They were expendable—they had been expended.

It was they who had reared the monoliths.

But to what purpose? Kyle found that he was very tired. He was so tired that the cold no longer seemed bitter to him. Sighing with fatigue he stretched out on the ground beside the monolith. How dim the sun was! He could look up at it open-eyed.

That, he supposed, was why they had built the monoliths. So they could leave the sun. The sun was dim because they were far from it. That must have been the effect of the last anti-phase, the last repulsion—an impulse to build the power towers that would drive Earth away from the other planets and its home star, the sun.

Now he was so tired that it didn't matter—now Earth was flying outward from its place in the solar system. On and on in that last gigantic repulsion, into the empty interstellar dark.

It would get colder on Earth, everything was finished. The seas would freeze and then, at last, the air. It was all over. It wasn't important. He sighed and shivered. What mattered, the vital thing, was the answer to the enigma that still vexed him. Who—who was Kyle?

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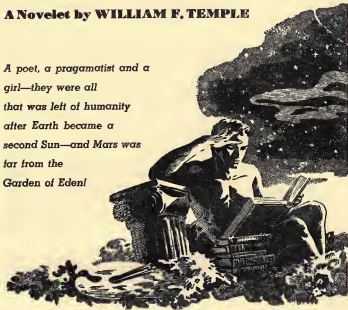
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THE TWO SHADOWS

A Novelet by WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

A poet, a pragmatist and a girl—they were all that was left of humanity after Earth became a second Sun—and Mars was far from the Garden of Eden!



THE idea that the world may someday and quite literally be blown up is scarcely a new one. Most of the ancient religions had it. However, of recent years, the doomsday legend has taken on new form and entirely new impact. For, according to the sundry tenets of yore, it was the Gods who led the world to its final ruin through their own folly—usually a result of meddling in mortal conflicts.

Nowadays the vision of world's end is all too clear—and man himself is the agent. Having abandoned the superfolk of Olympus and Valhalla, we have only ourselves to blame.

However, lingering as stubbornly as man's belief in an individual life-after-death is an insistent thread of hope that

such destruction will not be complete—that somewhere, on or under Earth or perhaps upon one of the planets, some humans will somehow survive to create a more equable cosmos for themselves. Mr. Temple in this story gives vivid presentation to how such survival might be accomplished.—THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I

Survivors

"BLESSED Necessity!" cried Leonardo da Vinci, in his day, knowing that it was the prime incentive. Man had to be driven to work his best mira-



cles. Creditors at one's heels were a sharper spur to the artist than his own inspiration.

The first voyage from Earth to Mars was certainly not the fruit of a hunger for knowledge—or of technicians in love with their work—or even of pride seeking power upon which to fatten.

It sprang from the starkest of all necessities—preservation of the species.

A divided Earth, struggling with a divided mind to preserve itself, had fallen into the desperate error of preventive war. The disease germs, as thick as clouds in the atmosphere, were prov-

ing to be the conquerors of both sides. Earth, quivering under the impacts of countless atomic missiles, many darted into its side by its own satellite and human colony, flung out a seed.

The seed was styled the *Nuova Vita*—as a sign that the Earth really knew better than it had behaved—and it was a rocket-ship five times the size of the Lunar vessels. It had both atomic and chemical drives. It had come straight off the drawing board. Its size and power were unprecedented. There was no time for real tests. In effect it was a tissue of theory, launched naked into

cold space, carrying twenty-six souls and the hope of the human race—at least the Anglo-American part of that race.

The gamble, it seemed, had come off. The seed missed the stony places—it was landing on the comparatively fertile soil of Mars. It was a thousand feet above that soil, sitting on its tail of braking chemical jets, descending with beautifully slow deliberation.

The pilot said happily, "We've done it!"

Fate never likes to be anticipated. A second later came a great light and a great heat. The habitually almost motionless atmosphere of Mars was scorched and stung into agitation. The heated air expanded almost like an explosion, tearing the concentrated gas-jets of the ship into long tenuous streamers.

The *Nuova Vita* tilted irrevocably off balance. It became a bone of contention between gravity and the upstreaming air. Its majesty had departed. It was a straw tossed by forces it had lately controlled.

They tossed it into a grassy area two Earth-miles from an ice-blue channel. But the soil was thin. There was hard rock beneath it and the rock broke the back of the *Nuova Vita*. It broke the backs of many of the little humans within and others died through the sheer concussion.

The wind howled over the wreck, under the sun—and under the small newborn companion to the sun.

THOMAS JEFFERSON JOHNS ran for his life among the firs. Luckily, the snow hadn't come yet but the bitter wind, driving against his face, was the herald of it. There was plenty of snow on the saw-edged peaks of the Rockies distant behind him.

Unhappily, not so far behind him, came the grizzly bear.

He looked back fearfully over his shoulder to see who was gaining. He never saw because he ran his head against a branch and was knocked off his feet. Flat on his back he went and

the ground seemed to be rocking like a boat beneath him. One side of his head felt as though it were bursting open. Much more of this and he would be sick.

The great head of the grizzly, with its small eyes and licking red tongue, loomed over him. He felt too ill to care now. The beast put its paws on his shoulders, began to shake him.

"Don't, don't—you're hurting my head!" John cried foolishly.

The bear seemed to go misty at the edges, become a mere dark form that was shaking him. Then it stopped and was still and he lay back, his eyes gradually refocusing it.

It wasn't a bear now. It was a big dark man with an olive skin and contemptuous brown eyes—John Malatesta.

Malatesta! The real world returned to him now. Malatesta, Schultz, Martin, Haywood, Liza, Pinky, Kilpatrick, Danby, Foster. . . .

There had been twenty-six of them including himself. The big business man, the chemist, the engineer, the agriculturist, the physician, the geologist, the cook, the bacteriologist, the artist—and the rest. All hand-picked, albeit hastily, by a harassed Government for their qualifications to start a new growth of mankind and yet preserve some of the knowledge and culture from the main stem which was dying.

He, Johns, had been picked, not merely because of his fame as a poet or because he was a Nobel Prize winner for literature but because also he had once been a teacher and a noteworthy educationalist.

How far Malatesta had been picked and how far he had pulled strings to force his election into the chosen few was not known to anyone on the ship but Malatesta himself. He had qualifications, of course. He was the chief of a huge organization in the States. With his organizing ability went toughness of mind and body and immense drive. He was the man to get things done. The only drawback was—the things had to be done his way.

Still, he was in a minority and could be curbed. There were other tough people on the ship, particularly Judge Hackman.

Johns struggled to sit up. There was a thin cold wind blowing.

"That's better," said Malatesta. "But take it easy. There's no hurry. We've got all the time there is."

Johns held his aching head—very lightly because it was painful to touch.

"What hit me?"

"Mars. Want to hit it back?"

Johns shook his head and wished he hadn't. More carefully he turned it to look around. Again he wished he hadn't.

This crazy tangle of broken alloy, with sharp swords of steel bristling from it, had been the main cabin. Once, he had seen a car wreck in which the two vehicles had met head on at the aggregate speed of a hundred and twenty miles an hour. This was worse, and bigger and there were a lot more bodies—and parts of bodies.

"Oh," he said and suddenly the nausea he had dreamed of returned and was made actual.

Gasping for breath afterwards, he turned red wet eyes on Malatesta.

"Tender stomach, eh?" said Malatesta with cynical amusement. "I'll break it to you gently, son. You and me are the only two left alive. And I'm not too sure about you."

Johns could only stare at him. Schultz, Martin, Haywood, Liza, Pinky, Kilpatrick, Danby, Foster. . . . All those who had become his friends, sharing this unparalleled adventure—carrying the torch for humanity together—full of a sense of nobility and responsibility—kindly and tolerant, indeed loving toward one another because they had a common aim in life, a great aim, and were there to help each other toward it.

All killed on the march by one senseless blow? Their aspirations mocked by fate and thrown on this ghastly scrapheap?

All—except himself and Malatesta, the one man he had regarded with antipathy and avoided?

He laid his head on his arm and cried, like a child who has suddenly discovered that the entire family has gone out and left him alone in the house—except for the big rough dog he dislikes and fears.

"Good," said Malatesta. "Keep it up. We're short of water. The tank got busted and it's all gone into the ground."

PRESENTLY Johns looked up and found he was alone except for—He got dizzily to his feet and scrambled out of that horrible place and away from the broken ship. It was surprisingly easy. He seemed to flutter in long jumps like a goose. Of course, the lesser gravitation . . .

This was Mars—just a lot of thin sick-looking grass, spreading in all directions. The sky was a very dark blue, almost black overhead, where faint stars twinkled. There was a singing in his ears which he had noticed at high altitudes in the Rockies. It came from the low air density.

Then he noticed that springing at thirty degrees from each other, from his feet across the grass, were two shadows, one fainter than the other. And despite the chill breeze there was warmth on the back of his neck.

He turned. There were two suns hanging in the sky, bright and white. Both were considerably smaller than the Sun he had known on Earth and one of them was appreciably smaller than the other.

He was no astronomer but he realized there was something definitely out of order here. However, before he could think about it much, Malatesta came up in long floating strides from somewhere along the great length of wreckage.

"Since you're up," he said, "you can give me a hand with things. Well, what do you think of Mars?"

Johns gestured toward the two suns. "I don't get that."

Malatesta said, "Perhaps you're not quite awake yet. It's obvious enough. I told you—you and me are the only two left alive—*anywhere*."

Johns grappled with his incredulity.

"You mean?"

"I mean that smaller sun up there is the Earth we left three months ago. I don't know who threw the bomb that started the chain reaction or whether it was too many bombs at once. I don't even know who won the war. I guess we did—we're the only survivors."

Johns gave a long sigh. The immense tragedy of it seemed to come pressing down from the sky onto his shoulders. He felt like Dante gazing into the Inferno—abandoned by Virgil, left utterly alone, not knowing the way out. He was the last of his kind. Malatesta didn't count, Malatesta was an insensitive ape.

He felt the tears trying to come again and he fought to keep them back. Malatesta would sneer. Then he thought, "What the hell do I care what he thinks? Why should I accept his judgment on what is right behavior? He's no more than a half-educated hoodlum."

Nevertheless he turned his face away and bowed his head, lest Malatesta should see.

"What are you doing—composing an epic poem about it?" said Malatesta sarcastically. "You're wasting your time. There's no one left to read it—except me. And I'm tone-deaf. Snap out of it. We're going to live. Therefore, we shall want living quarters. Come back to the wreck and help me."

CHAPTER II

The Curio

MALATESTA'S idea of being helped meant that when he said, "Carry that outside" or "Bring that here" Johns was to do it immediately and alone. Whenever Johns found a thing too heavy to lift Malatesta would, grumbling and impatient, take one end of it with a vigor which made it plain that he could have carried the whole thing himself without effort.

But it was mainly by Johns' labor

that the rough shack, with its table, chairs and couches, was built from suitable portions of the wreckage.

"Right," said Malatesta, surveying it. "That's good enough for now. It'll keep this damned wind off anyway. Now for a meal. It's lucky the cook's galley wasn't too badly burnt—even though the atomic heaters are no good. The whole system is smashed.

"But the food-store and the refrigerator vault stood up to it. There's plenty of grub in them. Go get a couple of loaves, a can of beef, some butter and cheese and crackers—we'll find ways of cooking some other time. Here are the keys."

"What about doing a bit of work yourself?" Johns broke in angrily. "Do you think I'm the maid-of-all-work here? I've done enough—far more than my share. You go and get the food."

Malatesta looked at him searchingly. He tossed the little bunch of keys in the air, caught it on its slow descent.

"Right," he said again. "If that's the way you want it."

"It's only fair—" began Johns in a high protesting voice but Malatesta turned on his heel and went.

He returned presently with the food and made a pile of sandwiches on the table. He drew up the couch alongside, lay back on it comfortably and reached for the top sandwich. Johns watched him eat two, then put his hand out tentatively for the third.

"Hands off!" snapped Malatesta. "No work, no eat. That's how it is. That's how it's going to be. That's how it always was—I didn't run a soup kitchen, you know. My workers had to work for their grub."

Johns stared at him. Then he said with quiet acidity, "You're wrong with both your facts and your analogy. Firstly, I have worked—hard. Secondly, I'm not one of your employees. On that ship we all had equal standing. Half that food is mine."

"No it isn't," said Malatesta with his mouth full. "You're wrong with your facts. We all had equal standing on the ship—yes. There were twenty-six of us.

That makes your share of the food one twenty-sixth, not a half. The second thing to understand is—we're not on the ship now."

"That's a childish kind of sophistry. The others are dead. They have no use for food."

"How do you know? Did you ask them? No—you just want to take it because they're helpless to stop you. That's all right. I agree with your philosophy and I'll underwrite it. I take the food, not only because they're helpless to stop me but because you are also."

"I see, Malatesta," said Johns, deliberately. "Might is right with you, eh?"

"You've got it, son." Malatesta helped himself to another sandwich. "That's what I believe because it's the truth."

"It isn't," flashed Johns. "You know it isn't. That's what you believe but only because it suits you to."

"Everybody believes what they'd like to believe. You only believe in a system of equal shares for all because you're weak—too weak to fight for your share. So you invent this thing you call social justice to get your share for you, so that you don't starve. You believe in social justice because it suits you to. I'll take the survival of the fittest—that suits me."

"Then I take it that you intend to starve me to death?"

"Mr. Johns, you take a very pessimistic view of things. The food is yours—all of it—if you can take it from me. Of course, I could break your neck with one hand—that's a risk you'd have to take. Or you could kill me if you could think of a method. Again you'd be at a slight disadvantage. I have this, you see—and you haven't."

HE pulled an old-fashioned automatic pistol from his pocket and held it balanced on his palm.

"A curio," he said, "but lethal. It was my grandfather's. He was an Italian who went over to the States to set up business—in nineteen twenty-four, it was. He ran a gang of bootleggers and

made a pile. When Prohibition was repealed he went into legitimate business. It became the family business. I owe much to him."

"Including your ideas on morality, no doubt, you filthy hoodlum."

Malatesta was off the couch in a bound. The pistol butt caught Johns on the bridge of his nose. He went over backward with a yelp of surprise and pain. The blood ran thickly from his nostrils. He blew and spluttered.

"Oh, stop squawking," said Malatesta. "That was only a love tap. I doubt if it's even broken your nose-bone. Regard it as a warning. I don't resent your insult as such—they're just words. What I don't like and won't have is your acting as though you're superior to me. You're not in any way."

"People learn from life, my friend, not from books. Experience is the only teacher—maybe you think you are. You've taught a lot of kids a lot of nonsense in your time. But you've nothing to teach me. You don't know anything. You don't even know that your college education and Nobel Prize don't qualify you as a superman—or even as a man."

Johns was holding a bloody handkerchief to his nose. His head still hurt from the landing crash and now it hurt in another place. But the worse hurt was to his sense of dignity. He had been caught by surprise and yelped like—

He had yelped like one of his own pupils many years ago. Somehow, he always remembered coming up silently that day behind young Perkins, who was absorbed in a comic when he should have been absorbed in Euclid. He remembered the joyous little spasm of power-feeling as he twisted the boy's ear and pulled his head around—to face his master.

He had been the master then.

It wasn't nearly so good being the pupil. He resented it fiercely. He hated Malatesta. If there was a way to kill him he would—

No, he mustn't think that. That was giving way to blind passion. He was

above that now. One could never be a master if one couldn't control his own passions. *He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city.*

Detachedly he wondered if young Perkins had felt like killing him on that far-off day.

He must control himself with this roughneck. He must feel himself superior but not make a parade of it. But he must never, never allow himself to feel inferior, certainly never act as one.

"You want to earn a cup of coffee?" asked Malatesta suddenly.

Johns, still holding his handkerchief to his nose, nodded. He would not trust himself to say anything. He might be too sarcastic.

"Right. Take that bucket. There's a water channel about two miles off in that direction. I saw it just before the smash. Bring back the bucket full and you can have your coffee and—I'll be generous—a couple of sandwiches."

Johns picked up the bucket and went off slowly over the long thin grass, his two shadows moving ahead of him.

This first sally into unexplored Mars should have been a great moment. Instead it presented itself as a wearisome task. It was Malatesta's fault, of course—his brutal materialism was death to all poetry and wonder and beauty. He poisoned romance. He belittled the really big things of life and magnified the pin-pricks. He'd have to be careful not to adopt his stunted values.

Damn his nose—would it never stop bleeding? His handkerchief was like a red flag. His face seemed to be little but a throbbing proboscis. He had never been struck before in his life. It seemed to have knocked his sense of values spinning.

IT was all wrong. He should be overwhelmed by the tragedy of the sudden end of homo sapiens. But he had seen that coming for too long. It had happened at last, that was all.

He felt a certain sense of loss but it was for the Acropolis, for the Uffizi Galleries, the Louvre, the Sistine Chapel,

the Taj Mahal—not for the lately living people of Earth. The hills that Shakespeare had walked on around Stratford-on-Avon, the City of London, redolent with history . . .

He had had no living relatives. As for the rest of his fellows, he had known few, respected fewer, loved none. None except his traveling companions on the *Nuova Vita*. That had been his real world. That was where he belonged, where he had found himself at last, among the élite. The loss of those people was a far greater tragedy than the loss of Earth.

The voice of one of the élite bellowed after him. "What are you trying to do—walk backwards? I want that coffee today. Get a move on."

Johns made a noise between a groan and a growl. "Shut up, you slimy thug!" he hissed in sick hatred. But he knew that Malatesta was too far away to hear him. Nevertheless he quickened his pace.

His handkerchief had become a sodden useless ball. Irritably he threw it to the ground. It alit on what had seemed to be a small gray stone half-hidden in the grass. The stone came alive with a leap and bounded off like a rabbit, giving a back kick with its rear legs. It was like an earless rabbit with the smooth gray skin of a mouse.

He watched it until it had vanished in the distance. So there was animal life on Mars after all. An irrational hope sprang within him. Were there somewhere intelligent Martians who could paint and sculpt and build, make music and write, think and discuss?

The great telescopes on the Moon, their magnification unhampered by any blurring atmosphere, had raked the planet for signs of intelligent life and seen none. Empty deserts of red dust, yes, and vast green plains. But not a town anywhere.

Most of the mapped canals were there but it seemed that the regularity of them had been an optical illusion. They were no straighter than any river. There was no more plan to them than to the Grand Canyon. So people had dropped

the description "canals" and called them what Scbiaparelli had really called them—channels.

Ahead of him now he could see the line across the broad strip of green that was one of these channels. Despite the lift given by the lesser gravity it seemed an age before he reached it.

There wasn't much to it then. The grass was longer and greener at its banks and that was about all. Compared with some of the other channels it was but a thread—fifty feet across. The water was pale blue, clear and cold. He could see where the soil ended and the rock-bed began. There was moss on the rocks at the bottom and he could have sworn that he saw one green rock move—a crustacean, surely.

The banks were just earth and rock—without trace of any Martian engineering. The water seemed to have worn its own channel. He tried to put the silly hope out of his head.

He drank, then washed the blood from his face. His nose had stopped giving but not hurting. He filled the hucket and took a last look around. The channel went waveringly from horizon to horizon. The other bank looked the same as the one he was standing on.

The long grass waved silently in the wind. There was nothing else to see. He turned his back on it and set out for the great ragged shape of the wreck under the two small bright suns. It was the only prominent feature in the flat landscape.

Presently he trod on something that rolled beneath his foot. He stumbled and spilt about a third of the water. Then he picked up the object. It was a knob of rock, twice the size of a man's fist.

As he inspected it his heart began to quicken. That irrational hope returned. Surely, surely, it had been consciously shaped? There were deep eye-sockets, a jutting nose, the suggestion of a mouth and chin. A primitive attempt at a human head or a badly weather-worn but comparatively modern one? Or—was it just his own wishful thinking?

Perhaps—there could have been very

little erosion in this climate. But it looked as good as many museum pieces he had seen. He put it in his pocket and resumed his journey.

When he got back all the sandwiches were gone and Malatesta said, "Why the hell didn't you fill the bucket?"

However, Malatesta had got some utensils from the ship and started a fire with splintered bookshelves. Johns went and got some more bread from the food-store.

CHAPTER III

And One Makes Three

AFTER they had finished the coffee they lay back and smoked. Johns got out the stone head and looked it over closely.

"What's that?" said Malatesta lazily.

Johns told him what he thought it might be. Malatesta was merely amused. He gave the thing a rough examination and tossed it back.

"Meteorite," he said. "You can see where it's pitted by the friction."

"But the shape?"

"Have you ever been to the Garden of the Gods, near Colorado Springs? The place is—was—lousy with chunks of rock that look like heads. You're just superimposing a pattern subjectively, like Lowell peering at this planet from Flagstaff a century ago and making neat little maps of the canals. Or like a patient of Rorschach's—the gink who started the psychiatrists playing the ink-blot game.

Johns looked at him with surprise. Malatesta then was not wholly a throw-back to his gangster grandfather despite his brutality and his deliberately coarse and ungrammatical speech. Sometime, somewhere, he had read books and some of it had stuck.

"I prefer to think it's the work of an intelligence," said Johns, shortly.

"Naturally. You believe what you want to believe like I said. You hope somewhere you'll find intelligent com-

panionship—not like mine. Me, I don't go for poetry or anything else that ain't any good to me."

"Your disapproval doesn't destroy the value of poetry," said Johns. "It's an eternal and indestructible value, far above your or my criticism. The same goes for any of the art forms—and Truth and Beauty and Goodness."

He breathed the last words so that the capitals were almost visibly apparent.

Malatesta, on the couch, regarded the glowing end of his cigarette. Then he said, slowly, thinking it out, "The sonnet form was a human invention—and it died with humanity. So did any standards of art form whatsoever. They were pretty unstable even when they existed—yesterday's art is today's laugh.

"Most of the naked Venuses of the so-called Old Masters are fat, unsightly lumps by the Two Thousand and Three A.D. standards of feminine beauty. Beauty is a matter of fashion, nothing more. If Mona Lisa had tried to get a job in the New York TV studios as an actress she'd have been told to go home and find her eyebrows."

"And how do you dispose of Goodness?"

"Just another matter of custom. Cannibalism was evil in America. In Polynesia not so long ago your grandmother's shade would have felt horribly slighted if you hadn't eaten her corpse and so absorbed her good qualities.

"I could give you a thousand examples of the same act being thought good in one place and evil in another. And you can kill people with kindness, you know. As for truth—no one's answered Pilate yet."

Johns stared at him. "I'm darned if I can make you out," he said. "One minute you talk like a thick-eared mugg and the next like a university graduate."

Malatesta laughed a fat laugh of self-satisfaction. "I've been both. And I'm schizophrenic."

"You're all wrong anyway. We try to superimpose patterns on material, certainly. But these patterns are eter-

nal standards which we glimpse through our imagination and try to record so that others may see them more clearly."

"If the patterns are eternal why do they change so often?"

"They don't. It's our imperfect vision, bad guesses and fumbling execution. Truth is outside of us and eternal."

Malatesta said, "The pragmatists don't think so and I'm a pragmatist. All thought is personal and purposive. Abstracts are figments. A judgment which is not prompted by motives is impossible. The only test of a truth is—does it work? If it doesn't it's meaningless."

"The opinion of the majority is against you."

"What majority? Listen, son—wake up! There's just you and me and no one else. There ain't a majority. My belief is just as good as yours."

JOHNS was shocked into consideration. He looked at his feet, thinking—if there are only two people in the world and one is a paranoiac and the other a manic depressive, what are the tests of sanity? Where are the standards of rational behavior?

Then he said, "I don't mean to be offensive, I have had more training in these things. My greater experience can be regarded as the majority."

Malatesta gave him the Bronx cheer, for old tradition.

"Can be regarded—by whom?" he jeered. "Only you, of course. I'm two hundred pounds—or was on Earth—to your hundred and forty. I'll choose to regard that extra sixty pounds of me as the majority."

"On the other hand I'm taller than you," snapped Johns spitefully. He knew he was talking foolishness.

"But I'm the better pool player," said Malatesta suavely, completing the *reductio ad absurdum*.

"This is nonsense!" cried Johns, angrily. "You can't just ignore history and pretend that this is the beginning of the world. What about Buddha and Aristotle and Lao-Tsze and—"

Malatesta swung around and pointed violently upward, over the wreck, at the

sky. "What about them?" he flung back. "See that star? It's just a star among a billion other stars. There may have been saints and sinners on the others too—and where is their wisdom now? That's finished, written off.

"I'm not pretending this is the beginning of the world—it is the beginning of the world as far as I'm concerned—*my* world!"

And in that moment, as Malatesta sat rigid with his arm upflung, a form emerged slowly from the wreck. Both men stared at it. "A Martian!" thought Johns, suddenly flushing with a new excitement. "A *Martian!*"

Malatesta let his arm fall. He swore under his breath. "This certainly is the beginning of the world," he said. "And *how!* Johns, here comes our majority."

She was dazed and her white dress was barred with black dirt and her fingers were bleeding. She was small, brunette, rather plump and they didn't recognize her as first.

"It's the nurse," said Johns, suddenly, recalling the face when it wasn't smudged and tear-stained. She had been a quiet little thing, keeping well in the background, and her services had not been required during the voyage. He hadn't heard her exchange a word with anyone and he wasn't sure of her name though he had heard it.

While he stood there, remembering her, Malatesta walked out to meet her. Johns cursed himself for his slowness. Malatesta picked her up, carried her over the wreckage-strewn grass and laid her on the couch.

"Get her a drink of water, beautiful dreamer," he said.

Presently they got her story in a faint Nebraskan accent. It was short. She had been in the women's lavatory when the crash came. She didn't remember anything after that except awakening in darkness under a load of wreckage and fighting for hours, pulling and pushing at the stuff, to get out.

She recalled scarcely more of what happened before that. She had only the sketchiest memory of the ship and the

voyage. She remembered there were people. Just people—no names to them. She didn't remember Malatesta and Johns.

"I thought I'd gone right through what's left of the ship," said Malatesta. "Didn't think of the ladies' room. Maybe I've got loss of memory too. What's your name?"

She didn't remember. She knew she came from Ogallala on the south fork of Platte River and had been a nurse.

Malatesta said, "We'll have to call you something."

"What about just 'Nurse'?" suggested Johns.

Malatesta rubbed his dark bristly jowls. "Nope. We'll call her Madge."

"Madge?" echoed Johns.

"Short for Majority, wideawake. Do I have to explain everything?"

CHAPTER IV

Rabbit on the Run

THE next morning, Johns was awakened by the clang of the bucket dropping beside him.

"More water," said Malatesta, standing over him. "I want breakfast."

Johns got up. "And a shave, too, no doubt," he murmured.

"Hell, no. I'm never shaving again. From now on I make my own social conventions."

"I'll come with you, Tom," said Madge.

As they walked side by side over the grass she said quietly, "He doesn't like you, does he?"

"The feeling is mutual. We haven't a thing in common. By the way, do you like poetry?"

"I—I think so. I don't know much about it."

"I could teach you if you're willing to learn. *He* isn't. You know, whether Art lives or dies depends wholly on you."

"Huh?"

"Art is the communication of feelings, ideas, standards. I am an artist in

a vacuum—with no one to communicate to. Actually an artist can't exist without an audience. No one ever writes or paints for himself alone. Those that pretend to were thinking of posterity. It's possible that we'll have no posterity. Will you be my audience, Madge?"

She smiled for the first time. She had nice teeth. "Sure, I'll try to be appreciative."

"Thanks a lot."

All the way to the channel and hack he expressed himself to her—his moods, his ideas, his fancies. He didn't give her much chance to talk.

As he was explaining to her his own theory of what Picasso had been getting at she exclaimed suddenly, "Ooh! What's that?" She pointed to a moving object in the grass.

He broke off, rather irritated by her branching attention: he'd thought she was absorbing the whole of it.

"Oh, that," he said. "There's plenty of 'em about. I call 'em Martian rabbits."

"Wonder if they're good to eat?"

"One day we'll have to find out. That food-store isn't going to last forever. Perhaps we'll finish up eating grass, like Nehuchadnezzar."

"Neb—who's he?"

A bit wearily he explained.

Three more days passed and nothing much happened except that the wind died down and became almost imperceptible, and the heat of the two suns could be more strongly felt. Malatesta seemed content to lounge, sleep, smoke and be sarcastic at Johns' expense. His one other diversion was Madge. What irked Johns was that Madge didn't seem to mind. In fact it was becoming plain that she preferred Malatesta's company to his.

On the fourth morning the split became apparent.

"Get the water," said Malatesta, so tersely and contemptuously that Johns grabbed the bucket with the wild idea of swinging it at that hristling contemptuous face. But an anticipatory pain in the nose caused him to throttle the intention.

Instead he gripped the bucket firmly and said, "Isn't it about time we moved to the channel-side? Then we'd have water on tap. Anyway this is an unhealthy spot. That ship's beginning to smell."

"I don't mind the smell," said Malatesta, "and all the water I need is brought to me. I like it here. There's a convenient larder with a lock on the door. There's nothing like that along by the channel."

"There may be all sorts of things better than that if we look around. We've never tried to explore any of this planet. We've scarcely moved from the ship."

"I'll think about it when I have to," said Malatesta. "Not before."

"You're some organizer," said Johns bitterly. "You haven't done a thing."

"You're some writer. You haven't written a line."

"What's the use?" cried Johns. "There's no one left to appreciate it."

"Exactly. Why bother? We all do it to cut a figure, don't we? And if there's no one to applaud us . . ." Malatesta shrugged.

"You don't claim you were an artist?"

MALATESTA regarded Johns with a queer look that combined derision and defense.

"In a way, yes. A better way than yours at that. Art is only expression. You express yourself merely in words. I in action. Try my way. You may get to like it. Begin now—go and get that water."

"To hell with the water!" exploded Johns and flung the bucket away violently. It landed, bounced slowly and rolled across the grass to where Madge sat. She got up and walked across to the two men.

"Don't hit him, Jack," she said.

"I'm not going to," said Malatesta. "It's impossible to teach this guy. He thinks he knows it all. I could see it would come to this. Here's your marching orders, Mr. Know-All. Clear off. Fend for yourself. I'm tired of keeping you. You don't belong in my world. You contribute nothing but belly-aching.

Scream out of here and don't come back."

Johns went a little pale and compressed his lips. "I was going anyway. I can't stomach this emperor and slave routine any more. You're mad and you're best left alone. Come on, Madge, we'll go start our own world."

Madge said, "I'm staying with Jack."

"What?" said Johns and looked appalled. "Why, for heaven's sake? He'll only make a slave out of you. He's impossible to live with. Is it because he's got the food? You don't have to worry about that. There's plenty of rabbits for us and shellfish and water. We might find edible vegetation somewhere."

"It isn't that," cut in Madge, irritably. "I'm staying with Jack because I prefer to. He's got the right ideas. And he's a man."

Malatesta grinned suddenly and put his arm about her waist. Johns felt a queer sharp pain. It was loneliness stabbing at him. It was as if he had been shut out of life, alone, unwanted.

"But—" he said weakly. "But I thought, Madge, you understood."

"You bore me sick," she said. "Yatter-yatter-yatter all the time about things that don't matter any more. Your feet don't touch the ground anywhere. I want a family. I want kids and a man who knows how to bring 'em up. Can you imagine what it'd be like for me with you, doing things your way?"

"I'd be doing all the man's work, while you'd be sitting with the kids, pumping 'em full of poetry and highfalutin' useless stuff, teaching 'em everything but how to look after themselves. That's the only important thing in this world—how to look after yourself. There's no college here to feed you just for lecturing."

"The majority, you see, Johns, is on my side," said Malatesta, his grin broadening.

All at once Johns hated them both with impotent fury. He turned away and walked toward the bucket.

Malatesta's grin vanished. "Leave the bucket!" he snapped. "That's my property. Leave everything except yourself."

Johns bent and picked up the stone shaped like a head.

"I trust you will allow me to take this?" he said with gritty mock-politeness.

"Sure. Start a museum with it. Now git!"

Without a backward glance Johns went. The world was against him. It seemed idiotic to think of one man and one woman as "the world" but factually it was very nearly true.

He had a mad impulse to smash things and there was nothing to smash except the weak bending grass-stalks. Then a "rabbit" crossed his path and instantly he smashed the stone down on top of it and broke the creature's back.

With that killing, the violence ebbed from his system, left him feeling weak and empty. He stared down at the broken mouse-skinned body. It looked pitifully small and lonely.

Unconsciously he identified it with himself and regretted his unplanned action. He might have caught the creature, tamed it, made a friend of it. If anyone ever needed a friend he did.

He picked up the stone thoughtfully and walked on. Presently he stopped, went back and picked up the rabbit. Perhaps a fellow couldn't help relapsing to childhood sometimes and feeling a need for pets and dolls to confide his troubles to. All the same he had to eat. He was on his own now. He must learn to be self-reliant.

He strode on, frowning, the stone in one hand and the rabbit in the other. What was it Emerson had said about self-reliance?

After a time he forgot Emerson, and by practise became expert in using the head as a throwing stone. He could hit a rabbit on the run at ten paces.

CHAPTER V

The Bonfire

A FORTNIGHT later Johns floated on his back in the channel, gazing up into the dark blue sky at the two

small suns and the faint stars. The air was still, the blue water placid. It was quiet and nothing disturbed the peace or threatened to.

And he felt like screaming.

Sometimes in the turmoil of Earth he had dreamed of life on a desert island. Once he had seriously thought of going into a monastery.

"Utter fool!" he said aloud. One thing he had learned—he was not by temperament a hermit. But then, Robinson Crusoe had had his Man Friday, his parrot, his goat. And the monks had fellow monks—and books.

How he longed for books! Even so they were only a substitute for the spoken word. Oh, for someone to speak to—even Malatesta! The man was not unintelligent although he was a brute. If he, Johns, had kept his temper they might have got along after a fashion.

Madge he still thought of with bitterness. She had not even troubled to argue with him. She had listened to him in silence, thinking only of him as a fool. It still hurt. But why should he consider her opinion worth anything? She was the fool, not he.

If only she had not at first seemed so pleasant. And if only she weren't so pretty. . . .

Why should she keep drifting into his mind's eye? Why should he hither to waste another thought on her? She was perfectly matched with Malatesta. A pair of pragmatists. They could, no doubt, raise a family of pragmatists, all of them unaware of the eternal truths because there was no poet to instruct them. A tribe without poetry.

He floated, with the water dulling his ears, quoting aloud the Caliph in *Hassan*. "Ah, if there shall ever arise a nation whose people have forgotten poetry . . . though their city be greater than Babylon of old, though they mine a league into earth or mount to the stars on wings—what of them?"

What had Hassan answered? "They will be a dark patch upon the world."

He tried to recall more of it and was impatient because he could not. He stared up at Earth, thinking of all the

literature that had perished.

Pater had advised the world to "burn with a hard, gemlike-flame." Now it was doing it—literally. In Earth's dark history there had been many a "burning of the books." This, the last, could never be surpassed. It was a funeral pyre and no Phoenix would arise from the ashes.

Not unless he did something about it.

The gloom that sat heavily upon him seemed to form itself into as heavy a cloak of responsibility, a garment he had tried to ignore, had tried to pretend was something else.

There had been a good library in the *Nuova Vita*. Much technical stuff but also a fine selection of literature intended for preservation. How much of it had been destroyed in the smash? It was his duty to preserve what was left.

Probably it was the last remnant of culture in the Solar System. So far as he could judge from a fortnight's trudging up and down the channel-side, peering at the distances, there was no sign of any Martian civilization, old or new. Perhaps there had never been one.

He had spent hours examining the stone head and was still undecided about it. Perhaps Malatesta had been right—perhaps he was reading a pattern into the chance work of nature merely because he wanted to see that pattern. On the other hand he might be just as right himself.

Surely, here on Mars, the eternal values reigned and had been glimpsed by some sentient indigenous creatures? This carved head was a sign, a symbol, a reassurance of that. Sometimes he was sure of it and glowed with excitement. At those times life would flood with meaning again.

And then at others the stone became a lifeless lump in his hands, drained of significance, just a gray-black meteorite. Then everything, including himself, was purposeless and of no more account than the dead stone.

No, the only chance was the books. He must get them.

Spurred by the resolution, he swam to the bank.

EVERYTHING looked much as before around the wreck except that at a little distance from the shack a large bright fire burned, sending up a wavering column of black smoke. As he neared it he could see Malatesta sitting on his couch by the fire. There was a heap on the ground at his side and occasionally Malatesta reached out, took something from the heap, threw it into the fire.

Johns looked around hopefully for the small plump figure of Madge. She was nowhere in sight.

When he was close enough to see just what Malatesta was doing he gave something between a shriek and a shout and ran toward the fire.

"Stop that!" he yelled. "Stop it, I say!"

Malatesta looked up at him calmly. "Thought I told you to stay away from here."

"Don't put any more of those books on the fire. I warn you," said Johns, breathlessly.

"You're a bit late. We've had the fire going for over a week."

"You vandal!" Johns dropped his throwing stone and knelt by the fire. It was all burning books, a tangle of charring gilt edges, leather bindings, printed rice paper.

He raked out one that had not properly caught and burned his fingers slapping at the smoldering spine. He dropped the book. It fell open at a page that began complacently, *We can, I believe, take it for granted that in the world of 2200, which we are trying to foresee with our imagination, the present ideological conflicts will have resolved themselves and mankind will have united under a common liberal education. . . .*

In a spasm of bitter disgust he thrust the book back into the flames.

"Make up your mind," said Malatesta, sarcastically.

Johns glared at him. "There is no need for this sort of thing. The grass provides endless fuel. You've only got to pull it up and let it dry. As I've done."

"Ah, but you didn't have any books.

They burn longer than grass and give more heat. I prefer warmth to idealism."

"You'll have to make do with grass in future. I want those books."

Malatesta looked him up and down appraisingly.

"Your fortnight in the wilderness seems to have toughened you up. Nevertheless I could still beat you up with one hand. So quit talking that way."

"It won't always be like this," said Johns between his teeth. "You're too fond of that couch. You're running to fat and self-indulgence. I'm getting stronger."

"Come back when you think you're strong enough," said Malatesta with steel in his voice. "I'll be ready for you. So will my sons—there'll be a lot of 'em and they'll be tough—because I know how to bring 'em up."

"Brought up on your philosophy they'll be a generation of vipers."

Malatesta clenched his fist hard. In the same instant Johns grabbed his throwing stone and stood up. They regarded each other, frozen, tense. Then, slowly, Malatesta let his hand open.

"You still don't like my ideas, huh?"

"They're the quintessence of evil. You could build nothing from them but a soulless hell."

Malatesta gave a short, hard laugh. "That's funny. I've always regarded you as the serpent in this particular Garden of Eden."

"Your mistake. You're the serpent in these parts."

"As I recall it," said Malatesta, "the serpent made Eve eat of the forbidden Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. That's exactly what you tried to do with Madge. Haven't you discovered yet that knowledge and happiness are incompatible? I thought you knew your Greek philosophy. I'd rather be a happy pig than an unhappy Socrates. If we're ignorant, Madge and me, we're happy in our ignorance. You and your Truth!"

He spat and there was a confirmatory hiss from the fire.

He went on, "Why must your sort always interfere, always preach, thinking you know it all and that everyone

else has got to think the same as you? It was fanatics like you who brought our world to destruction. We're satisfied with making our own little truths to suit ourselves—no factory stuff.

"Each man to his own belief and let the other guy alone. But that's not good enough for you. You've got to pretend that yours is the only truth and try to stuff it down our throats. Intolerant fool! What a hell you would make here if you had your way—as you made a hell upon Earth."

"You idiot!" said Johns, fiercely. "Earth went up in flames simply because of millions of people like you making themselves a law unto themselves. You undermined the belief in morals which was our only hope. When that code fell Earth fell."

MALATESTA seemed not to have heard him. He had picked up a book from the heap and was regarding its title.

"The Works of John Keats," he said. "Well, well. 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all ye know on earth and all ye need to know.' On Earth. But this is Mars."

He tossed the book casually into the fire. An instant later the throwing stone crashed against his skull and killed him.

Johns stood over the body, fallen from its couch, not seeing it, not seeing anything but a red mist. When it cleared he was sick and the works of Keats had gone forever.

There came a cry, the thud of a dropped bucket, the wash of water over the grass. Then Madge came running and flung herself on the body, sobbing and crying, "*Jack! Jack!*"

Johns watched her dully for a moment. Then he went off a little way and lay on the grass, face downward, making a pillow of his arms. His head was whirling and he could get nothing straight.

Presently, she came and stood over him.

"You murderer!"

He half-turned his head, and mumbled, "He—" He stopped. What was the

use of trying to explain to her the loss of Keats or the chain of clashes which had led up to that last act of vandalism being the immediate pull on a hair-trigger? There must have been half-a-dozen mixed motives, which he had neither the ability nor the will to sort out now.

"He went for his gun," he said. "It was self-defense."

"That's a lie," said Madge, coldly. "He never had his gun. Because I had it. I've still got it and I'm going to use it. Turn around. Do you want to be shot in the back?"

Slowly he turned over and sat up. Madge's face was pale and tear-stained, but determined, and the automatic that pointed down at him was steady. Over her left shoulder burned the Earth—over her right the Sun.

"Every time I went to get the water, he would give me the gun—in case I met you and you tried anything. He didn't care about himself. He could have killed you with one hand."

"I guess he told you that himself," murmured Johns, wearily. "Okay, go ahead if you believe you ought to. I give up. Whatever you believe you're as right as I am. When I am gone you will always be wholly and absolutely right—until you die."

The gun began to tremble a little.

"I loved him," she said. "He was rough but—I loved that man. Now you've killed him. I'm going to kill you. That's justice."

"If you think so. But that's an abstract he didn't believe in, of course. If you kill me, thinking that, I win. But is your motive really justice? It might be revenge—or anger at being deprived of his attentions—and his children. Don't give it a name. Just act how you feel—that was his philosophy and yours. I'm not afraid. What have I to live for?"

"You killed him because you wanted me, didn't you?" she said.

"If you think so. What does it matter now? Shoot—get it over with."

"Oh!" she said, suddenly, and threw the gun away and burst into tears. "I don't want to be alone!" she sobbed.

"And I want so to have children."

He stared at her in amazement. Then he got up and took hold of her, swinging her half-around. He kissed her and she clung to him.

"Don't leave me alone!" she cried. "Don't ever leave me alone!"

He held her, tightening his grip. "It's all right, Madge. We'll keep together. We're all that are left—anywhere."

Over her shoulder he saw their united shadows slanting across the grass in a long V. Only two of them left but between them they had four shadows.

It was odd but it was Malatesta's materialistic philosophy, adopted by Madge, that had now saved his life. Madge had let him live only because she needed him, because of the practical outcome. If he had succeeded in imbuing her with his abstract ideals he would be as dead as Malatesta.

Had he been wrong? Would he ever really know?

Was there something symbolic in the double shadows or was he reading patterns into things again? Here a man cast one shadow by the light of the sinful suicidal Earth, another by the light of the life-giving Sun. Wherever you stood you could not escape the duality.

So long as there were the two sources you were bound to be affected by them both. You could not choose to stand only in the light of one.

"We are what we are according to our lights," he said, under his breath. Madge pressed herself even closer to him.

IT was some time later that he discovered that, though Malatesta's skull had been split open, it had been sufficiently hard to do the same to the missile which had struck it. The stone head was gaping apart, showing its own brain.

The cells of the brain were tight-packed in the cavity—thousands of

rolls of incredibly thin but tough metal tape, scarcely an eighth of an inch wide. He could just make out some of the little colored pictures on them. To those who had made them they must have been great banners, blazoning forth the history and knowledge of their race.

"Think of it, Madge!" he said, excitedly. "Of all the incredible luck! To stumble like this on the records they preserved for posterity. It was a head—humanoid, too. I wonder where the body is? We must look for it."

"There may be lots of 'em around," she said. "Our people were always doing that sort of thing, weren't they?"

"Who'd have thought the Martians were such tiny folk!" he said. "There was I, carrying this in my hand, scanning the horizons for man-sized relics. There must be plenty of traces but we'll have to look under the grass, not over it."

"Uh-huh," she said, more concerned with the fire, which was dying down just as the rabbit-stew was nearing the boil. She reached for a book and gave it to him to censor.

He glanced at it absently:

"Lord, no, not that one! We'll need it when we get down to work, making our instruments."

He laid *Microscopy and Optical Systems* on the grass beside him.

She handed him another. He looked at it, and smiled. "We'll need that, too." He laid *Obstetrics* on top of the other book.

Patiently she held up another for his inspection.

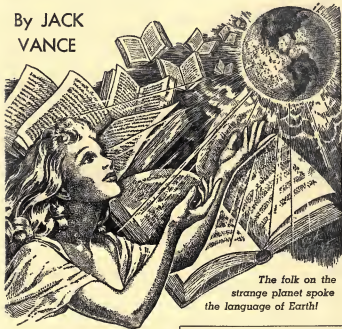
"Brrr!" he said. "Burn that."

She poked *Income Tax Accountancy* carefully under the pot and the flames gathered life. She peeped into the pot and was satisfied with what she saw. The stew was thickening nicely and they would have a rich supper. It seemed just about the most important thing in life to her at that moment.

Read the Novel of Shocking Predictions—ENSLAVED BRAINS, by Eando Binder, complete science fiction classic in the gala Winter Issue of FANTASTIC STORY QUARTERLY, 25c at all stands!

MEN of the TEN BOOKS

By JACK
VANCE



*The folk on the
strange planet spoke
the language of Earth!*

THEY were as alone as it is possible for living man to be in the black gulf between the stars. Far astern shone the suns of the home worlds—ahead the outer stars and galaxies in a fainter ghostly glimmer.

The cabin was quiet. Betty Welstead sat watching her husband at the assay table, her emotions tuned to his. When the centrifuge scale indicated heavy metal and Welstead leaned forward she leaned forward too in unconscious sym-

EVER since *THE WORLD THINKER* appeared in Summer, 1945, *TWS*, we have been asked, "Who is Jack Vance?" His identity has been feebly surmised to be everything from a house by-line to another pseudonym for the redoubtable Harry Kuttner. Actually he is a young (thirty-ish) alumnus of University of California and World War Two Merchant Marine, whose he was torpedoed twice. By his own account he first thought about star travel on his seventh birthday and has not stopped yet. Hallmarks of a Vance story are a crisp polychromatic imagination, swift well-integrated action and a solid bed of human idealism, often nurtured ingeniously into flowerings of cynicism. His stories and the people and other creatures in them have a way of springing vividly to life—for proof, just read this story!

pathy. When he burnt scrapings in the spectroscope and read *Lead* from the brightest pattern and chewed at his lips Betty released her pent-up breath, fell back in her seat.

Ralph Welstead stood up, a man of medium height—rugged, tough-looking—with hair and skin and eyes the same tawny color. He brushed the whole cluster of rock and ore into the waste chute and Betty followed him with her eyes.

Welstead said sourly, "We'd be millionaires if that asteroid had been inside the Solar system. Out here, unless it's pure platinum or uranium, it's not worth mining."

Betty broached a subject which for two months had been on the top of her mind. "Perhaps we should start to swing back in."

Welstead frowned, stepped up into the observation dome. Betty watched after him anxiously. She understood very well that the instinct of the explorer as much as the quest for minerals had brought them out so far.

Welstead stepped back down into the cabin. "There's a star ahead"—he put a finger into the three-dimensional chart—"this one right here, Eridanus two thousand nine hundred and thirty-two. Let's make a quick check—and then we'll head back in."

Betty nodded, suddenly happy. "Suits me." She jumped up, and together they went to the screen. He aimed the catch-all vortex, dialed the hurrying blur to stability and the star pulsed out like a white-hot coin. A single planet made up the entourage.

"Looks about Earth-size," said Welstead, interest in his voice, and Betty's heart sank a trifle. He tuned the circuit finer, turned up the magnification and the planet leapt at them.

"Look at that atmosphere! *Thick!*" He swiveled across the jointed arm holding the thermocouple and together they bent over the dial.

"Nineteen degrees Centigrade. About Earth-norm. Let's look at that atmosphere. You know, dear, we might have something tremendous here! Earth-size, Earth temperature . . ." His

voice fell off in a mutter as he peered through the spectroscope, flipping screen after screen past the pattern from the planet. He stood up, cast Betty a swift exultant glance, then squinted in sudden reflection. "Better make sure before we get too excited."

Betty felt no excitement. She watched without words as Welstead thumbed through the catalogue.

"*Whee!*" yelled Welstead, suddenly a small boy. "No listing! It's ours!" And Betty's heart melted at the news. Delay, months of delay, while Welstead explored the planet, charted its oceans and continents, classified its life. At the same time, a spark of her husband's enthusiasm caught fire in her brain and interest began to edge aside her gloom.

"We'll name it 'Welstead,'" he said. "Or, no—'Elizabeth' for you. A planet of your own! Some day there'll be cities and millions of people. And every time they write a letter or throw a shovelful of dirt or a ship lands—they'll use your name."

"No, dear," she said. "Don't be ridiculous. We'll call it 'Welstead'—for us both."

They felt an involuntary pang of disappointment later on when they found the planet already inhabited, and by men.

YET their reception astonished them as much as the basic discovery of the planet and its people. Curiosity, hostility might have been expected. . . .

They had been in no hurry to land, preferring to fall into an orbit just above the atmosphere, the better to study the planet and its inhabitants.

It looked to be a cheerful world. There were a thousand kinds of forest, jungle, savannah. Sunny rivers coursed green fields. A thousand lakes and three oceans glowed blue. To the far north and far south snowfields glittered, dazzled. Such cities as they found—the world seemed sparsely settled—merged indistinguishably with the countryside.

They were wide low cities, very different from the clanging hives of Earth, and lay under the greenery like carv-

ings in alabaster or miraculous snowflakes. Betty, in whose nature ran a strong streak of the romantic, was entranced.

"They look like cities of Paradise—cities in a dream!"

Welstead said reflectively, "They're evidently not backward. See that cluster of long gray buildings off to the side? Those are factories."

Betty voiced a doubt which had been gradually forming into words. "Do you think they might—resent our landing? If they've gone to the trouble of creating a secret—well, call it Utopia—they might not want to be discovered."

Welstead turned his head, gazed at her eye to eye. "Do you want to land?" he asked soberly.

"Why, yes—if you do. If you don't think it's dangerous."

"I don't know whether it's dangerous or not. A people as enlightened as those cities would seem to indicate would hardly maltreat strangers."

Betty searched the face of the planet. "I think it would be safe."

Welstead laughed. "I'm game. We've got to die sometime. Why not out here?"

He jumped up to the controls, nosed the ship down.

"We'll land right in their laps, right in the middle of that big city down there."

Betty looked at him questioningly.

"No sense sneaking down out in the wilds," said Welstead. "If we're landing we'll land with a flourish."

"And if they shoot us for our insolence?"

"Call it Fate."

They bellied down into a park in the very center of the city. From the observation dome Welstead glimpsed hurrying knots of people.

"Go to the port, Betty. Open it just a crack and show yourself. I'll stay at the controls. One false move, one dead cat heaved at us, and we'll be back in space so fast they won't remember we arrived."

Thousands of men and women of all ages had surrounded the ship, all shouting, all agitated by strong emotion.

"They're throwing flowers!" Betty gasped. She opened the port and stood in the doorway and the people below shouted, chanted, wept. Feeling rather ridiculous, Betty waved, smiled.

She turned to look back up at Welstead. "I don't know what we've done to deserve all this but we're heroes. Maybe they think we're somebody else."

Welstead craned his neck through the observation dome. "They look healthy—normal."

"They're beautiful," said Betty. "All of them."

The throng opened, a small group of elderly men and women approached. The leader, a white-haired man, tall, lean, with much the same face as Michelangelo's Jehovah, stood forth.

"Welcome!" he called resonantly. "Welcome from the people of Haven!"

BETTY stared, and Welstead clambered down from the controls. The words were strangely pronounced, the grammar was archaic—but it was the language of Earth.

The white-haired man spoke on, without calculation, as if delivering a speech of great familiarity. "We have waited two hundred and seventy-one years for your coming, for the deliverance you will bring us."

Deliverance? Welstead considered the word. "Don't see much to deliver 'em from," he muttered aside to Betty. "The sun's shining, there's flowers on all the trees, they look well-fed—a lot more enthusiastic than I do. Deliver 'em from what?"

Betty was climbing down to the ground and Welstead followed.

"Thanks for the welcome," said Welstead, trying not to sound like a visiting politician. "We're glad to be here. It's a wonderful experience, coming unexpectedly on a world like this."

The white-haired man bowed gravely. "Naturally you must be curious—as curious as we are about the civilized universe. But for the present, just one question for the ears of our world. How goes it with Earth?"

Welstead rubbed his chin, acutely con-

scious of the thousands of eyes, the utter silence.

"Earth," he said, "goes about as usual. There's the same seasons, the same rain, sunshine, frost and wind." And the people of Haven breathed in his words as devoutly as if they were the purest poetry. "Earth is still the center of the Cluster and there's more people living on Earth than ever before. More noise, more nuisance . . ."

"Wars? New governments? How far does science reach?"

Welstead considered. "Wars? None to speak of—not since the Hieratic League broke up. The government still governs, uses lots of statistical machinery. There's still graft, robbery, inefficiency, if that's what you mean.

"Science—that's a big subject. We know a lot but we don't know a lot more, the way it's always been. Everything considered it's the same Earth it's always been—some good, a lot of bad."

He paused, and the pent breath of the listeners went in a great sigh. The white-haired man nodded again, serious, sober—though evidently infected with the excitement that fired his fellows.

"No more for the present! You'll be tired and there's much time for talk. May I offer you the hospitality of my house?"

Welstead looked uncertainly at Betty. Instinct urged him not to leave his ship.

"Or if you'd prefer to remain aboard . . ." suggested the man of Haven.

"No," said Welstead. "We'll be delighted." If harm were intended—as emphatically did not seem likely—their presence aboard the ship would not prevent it. He craned his neck, looked here and there for the officiousness that would be bumpiously present on Earth.

"Is there anyone we should report to? Any law we'll be breaking by parking our ship here?"

The white-haired man laughed. "What a question! I am Alexander Clay, Mayor of this city Mytilene and Guide of Haven. By my authority and by common will you are free of anything the planet can offer you. Your ship will not be molested."

He led them to a wide low car and Betty was uncomfortably conscious of her blue shorts, ruffled and untidy by comparison with the many-colored tunics of the women in the crowd.

Welstead was interested in the car as providing a gauge of Haven's technics. Built of shiny gray metal it hung a foot above the ground, without the intervention of wheels. He gave Clay a startled look. "Anti-gravity? Your fortune's made."

Clay shook his head indulgently. "Magnetic fields, antipathetic to the metal in the road. Is it not a commonplace on Earth?"

"No," said Welstead. "The theory, of course, is well-known but there is too much opposition, too many roads to dig up. We still use wheels."

Clay said reflectively, "The force of tradition. The continuity which generates the culture of races. The stream we have been so long lost from . . ."

Welstead shot him a sidelong glance. Clay was entirely serious.

THE car had been sliding down the road at rather high speed through vistas of wonderful quiet and beauty. Every direction showed a new and separate enchantment—a glade surrounded by great trees, a small home of natural wood, a cluster of public buildings around a plaza, a terrace checkered with trees and lined with many-colored shops.

Occasionally there were touches of drama, such as the pylon at the end of a wide avenue. It rose two hundred feet into the air, a structure of concrete, bronze and black metal, and it bore the heroic figure of a man grasping vainly for a star.

Welstead craned his neck like a tourist. "Magnificent!"

Clay assented without enthusiasm. "I suppose it's not discreditable. Of course, to you, fresh from the worlds of civilization—" He left the sentence unfinished. "Excuse me, while I call my home." He bent his head to a telephone.

Betty said in Welstead's ear, "This is a city every planner on Earth would sell his soul to build."

Welstead granted. "Remember Halleck?" he muttered. "He was a city planner. He wanted to tear down a square mile of slums in Lanchester, eighteen stories high on the average, nothing but airless three-room apartments.

"First the real estate lobby tore into him, called him a Chaoticist. A rumor circulated among his friends that he was morally degenerate. The poor devils that lived there tried to lynch him because they'd be evicted. The Old Faithfuls read him out of the party because they pulled the votes of the district. The slums are still there and Halleck's selling farm implements on Arcturus Five."

Betty looked off through the trees. "Maybe Haven will turn out to be an object lesson for the rest of the cluster."

Welstead shrugged. "Maybe, maybe not. Peace and seclusion are not something you can show to a million people—because it isn't peace and seclusion any more."

Betty sat up straighter in her seat. "The only way to convince the unbelievers is by showing them, setting them an example. Do you think that if the Lanchester slum-dwellers saw this city they'd go back to their three-room apartments without wanting to do something about it?"

"If they saw this city," said Welstead, "they'd never leave Haven. By hook or crook, stowaway or workaway, they'd emigrate."

"Include me in the first wave!" said Betty indignantly.

The car turned into a leafy tunnel, crossed a carpet of bright green turf, stopped by a house built of dark massive wood. Four high gables in a row overlooked a terrace, where a stream followed its natural bed. The house looked spacious, comfortable—rather like the best country villas of Earth and the garden planets without the sense of contrived effect, the strain, the staging.

"My home," said Clay. He slid back a door of waxed blond wood, ushered them into an entry carpeted with golden rattan, walled with a fabric the color of the forest outside. A bench of glowing dark wood crossed a wall under a framed

painting. From no apparent source light flooded the room, like water in a tank.

"One moment," said Clay with a trace of embarrassment. "My home is poor and makeshift enough without exposing it to your eyes at its worst." He was clearly sincere; this was no conventional deprecation.

He started away, paused and said to his half-comprehending guests, "I must apologize for our backwardness but we have no facilities for housing notable guests, no great inns or embassies or state-houses such as must add to the dignity of life on Earth. I can only offer you the hospitality of my home."

Welstead and Betty both protested. "We don't deserve as much. After all we're only a pair of fly-by-night prospectors."

Clay smiled and they could see that he had been put more at his ease. "You're the link between Haven and civilization—the most important visitors we've ever had. Excuse me." He departed.

Betty went to the picture on the wall, a simple landscape—the slope of a hill, a few trees, a distant range of mountains. Welstead, with small artistic sensibility, looked around for the source of the light—without success. He joined Betty beside the picture. She said half-breathlessly, "This is a—I'm afraid to say it—a masterpiece."

Welstead squinted, trying to understand the basis of his wife's awe and wonderment. Indeed the picture focused his eyes, drew them in and around the frame, infused him with a pleasant exhilaration, a warmth and serenity.

Clay, returning, noticed their interest. "What do you think of it?" he asked.

"I think it's—exceedingly well done," said Betty, at a loss for words which would convey her admiration without sounding fulsome.

Clay shook his head ruefully, turned away. "You need not praise an inconsequentiality out of courtesy, Mrs. Welstead. We know our deficiencies. Your eyes have seen the Glottos, the Rembrandts, the Cezannes. This must seem a poor thing."

BETTY began to remonstrate but halted. Words evidently would not convince Clay—or perhaps a convention of his society prompted him to belittle the works of his people and it might be discourteous to argue too vehemently.

"Your quarters are being prepared," Clay told them. "I've also ordered fresh clothing for you both as I see yours are stained with travel."

Betty blushed, smoothed the legs of her blue shorts. Welstead sheepishly brushed at his faded blouse. He reached in his pocket, pulled out a bit of gravel. "From an asteroid I prospected a few weeks ago." He twisted it around in his fingers. "Nothing but granite, with garnet inclusions."

Clay took the bit of rock, inspected it with a peculiar reverence. "May I keep this?"

"Why, of course."

Clay laid the bit of stone on a silver plate. "You will not understand what this small stone symbolizes to us of Haven. Interstellar travel—our goal, our dream for two hundred and seventy-one years."

The recurrence of the period two hundred and seventy-one years! Welstead calculated. That put them back into the Era of the Great Excursions, when the over-under space-drive had first come into use, when men drove pell-mell through the galaxy, like bees through a field of flowers and human culture flared through space like a super-nova.

Clay led them through a large room, simple in effect, rich in detail. Welstead's vision was not analytical enough to catch every particular at first. He sensed overall tones of tan, brown, mellow blue, watery green, in the wood, fabric, glass, pottery—the colors combined to marvelous effect with the waxy amber gleam of natural wood. At the end of the room a case held ten large books bound in black leather and these, by some indefinable emphasis, seemed to bear the significance of an icon.

They passed through a passage open along one side into a garden filled with flowers, low trees, tame birds. Clay showed them into a long apartment

streaming with sunlight.

"Your bath is through the door," said Clay. "Fresh clothes are laid out on the bed. When you are rested I shall be in the main hall. Please be at leisure—the house is yours."

They were alone. Betty sighed happily, sank down on the bed. "Isn't it wonderful, dear?"

"It's queer," said Welstead, standing in the middle of the room.

"What's queer?"

"Mainly why these people, apparently gifted and efficient, act so humble, so self-deprecating."

"They look confident."

"They are confident. Yet as soon as the word Earth is mentioned it's like saying Alaklak to an exiled Lak. There's nothing like it."

Betty shrugged, began to remove her clothes. "There's probably some very simple explanation. Right now I'm tired of speculating. I'm for that bath. Water, water, water! *Tons* of it!"

THEY found Clay in the long hall with his pleasant-faced wife, his four youngest children, whom he gravely introduced.

Welstead and Betty seated themselves on a divan and Clay poured them small china cups of pale yellow-green wine, then settled back in his own seat.

"First I'll explain our world of Haven to you—or have you surmised our plight?"

Welstead said, "I guess a colony was planted here and forgotten—lost."

Clay smiled sadly. "Our beginnings were rather more dramatic. Two hundred and seventy-one years ago the passenger packet *Etruria*, enroute to Rigel, went out of control. According to the story handed down to us the bus-bars fused inside the drive-box. If the case were opened the fields would collapse. If it were not the ship would fly until there was no more energy."

Welstead said, "That was a common accident in the old days. Usually the engineer cut away the thrust-blocks on one side of the hull. Then the ship flew in circles until help arrived."

Clay made a wry sad grimace. "No one on the *Etruria* thought of that. The ship left the known universe and finally passed close to a planet that seemed capable of sustaining life. The sixty-three aboard took to the life-boats and so landed on Haven.

"Thirty-four men, twenty-five women, four children—ranging in age from Dorothy Pell, eight, to Vladimir Hocha, seventy-four, with representatives of every human race. We're the descendants of the sixty-three—three hundred million of us."

"Fast work," said Betty, with admiration.

"Large families," returned Clay. "I have nine children, sixteen grandchildren. From the start our guiding principle has been to keep the culture of Earth intact for our descendants, to teach them what we knew of human tradition.

"So that when rescue came—as it must finally—then our children or our children's children could return to Earth, not as savages but as citizens. And our invaluable source has been the Ten Books, the only books brought down from the *Etruria*. We could not have been favored with books more inspiring. . . ."

Clay's gaze went to the black bound books at the end of the room, and his voice lowered a trifle.

"The *Encyclopedia of Human Achievement*. The original edition was in ten little plastrol volumes, none of them larger than your hand—but in them was such a treasury of human glory that never could we forget our ancestry, or rest in our efforts to achieve somewhere near the level of the great masters. All the works of the human race we set as our standards—music, art, literature—all were described in the *Encyclopedia*."

"Described, you say," mused Welstead.

"There were no illustrations?" asked Betty.

"No," said Clay, "there was small compass for pictures in the original edition. However"—he went to the case, selected a volume at random—"the

words left little to the imagination. For example, on the music of Bach—"When Bach arrived on the scene the toccata was tentative, indecisive—a recreation, a *tour de force*, where the musician might display his virtuosity.

"In Bach the toccata becomes a medium of the noblest plasticity. The theme he suggests by casual fingering of the keyboard, unrelated runs. Then comes a glorious hurst into harmony—the original runs glow like prisms, assume stature, gradually topple together into a miraculous pyramid of sound."

"And on Beethoven—"A God among men. His music is the voice of the world, the pageant of all imagined splendor. The sounds he invokes are natural forces of the same order as sunsets, storms at sea, the view from mountain crags."

"And on Leon Bismarck Beiderbecke—"His trumpet pours out such a torrent of ecstasy, such triumph, such overridding joys that the heart of man freezes in anguish at not being wholly part of it." Clay closed the book, replaced it. "Such is our heritage. We have tried to keep alive, however poorly, the stream of our original culture."

"I would say that you have succeeded," Welstead remarked dryly.

Betty sighed, a long slow suspiration.

Clay shook his head. "You can't judge until you've seen more of Haven. We're comfortable enough though our manner of living must seem unimpressive in comparison with the great cities, the magnificent palaces of Earth."

"No, not at all," said Betty but Clay made a polite gesture.

"Don't feel obliged to flatter us. As I've said, we're aware of our deficiencies. Our music for instance—it is pleasant, sometimes exciting, sometimes profound, but never does it reach the heights of poignancy that the *Encyclopedia* describes.

"Our art is technically good but we despair of emulating Seurat, who 'outlumens light,' or Braque, 'the patterns of the mind in patterns of color on the patterns of life,' or Cezanne—"the planes which under the guise of natural objects

march, merge, meet in accord with remorseless logic, which wheel around and impel the mind to admit the absolute justice of the composition.' "

Betty glanced at her husband, apprehensive lest he speak what she knew must be on his mind. To her relief he kept silent, squinting thoughtfully at Clay. For her part Betty resolved to maintain a noncommittal attitude.

"No," Clay said heavily, "we do the best we can, and in some fields we've naturally achieved more than in others. To begin with we had the benefit of all human experience in our memories. The paths were charted out for us—we knew the mistakes to avoid. We've never had wars or compulsion. We've never permitted unreined authority. Still we've tried to reward those who are willing to accept responsibility.

"Our criminals—very few now—are treated for mental disorder on the first and second offense, sterilized on the third, executed on the fourth—our basic law being cooperation and contribution to the society, though there is infinite latitude in how this contribution shall be made. We do not make society a juggernaut. A man may live as integrally or as singularly as he wishes so long as he complies with the basic law."

Clay paused, looking from Welstead to Betty. "Now do you understand our way of living?"

"More or less," said Welstead. "In the outline at least. You seem to have made a great deal of progress technically."

Clay considered. "From one aspect, yes. From another no. We had the lifeboat tools, we had the technical skills and most important we knew what we were trying to do. Our main goal naturally has been the conquest of space. We've gone up in rockets but they can take us nowhere save around the sun and back. Our scientists are close on the secret of the space-drive but certain practical difficulties are holding them up."

Welstead laughed. "Space-drive can never be discovered by rational effort. That's a philosophical question which has been threshed back and forth for

hundreds of years. Reason—the abstract idea—is a function of ordinary time and space. The space-drive has no qualities in common with these ideas and for this reason human thought can never consciously solve the problem of the overdrive. Experiment, trial and error can do it. Thinking about it is useless."

"Hm," said Clay. "That's a new concept. But now your presence makes it beside the point, for you will be the link back to our homeland."

Betty could see words trembling on her husband's tongue. She clenched her hands, willed—willed—*willed*. Perhaps the effort had some effect because Welstead merely said, "We'll do anything we can to help."

ALL of Mytilene they visited and nearby Tiryns, Dicte and Ilium. They saw industrial centers, atomic power generators, farms, schools. They attended a session of the Council of Guides, both making brief speeches, and they spoke to the people of Haven by television. Every news organ on the planet carried their words.

They heard music from a green hillside, the orchestra playing from under tremendous smoke black trees. They saw the art of Haven in public galleries, in homes and in common use. They read some of the literature, studied the range of the planet's science, which was roughly equivalent to that of Earth. And they marveled continually how so few people in so little time could accomplish so much.

They visited the laboratories, where three hundred scientists and engineers strove to force magnetic, gravitic and vortigial fields into the fusion that made star-to-star flight possible. And the scientists watched in breathless tension as Welstead inspected their apparatus.

He saw at a single glance the source of their difficulty. He had read of the same experiments on Earth three hundred years ago and of the fantastic accident that had led Roman-Forteski and Gladheim to enclose the generatrix in a dodecahedron of quartz. Only by such a freak—or by his information—would

these scientists of Haven solve the mystery of space-drive.

And Welstead walked thoughtfully from the laboratory, with the disappointed glances of the technicians following him out. And Betty had glanced after him in wonder, and the rest of the day there had been a strain between them.

That night as they lay in the darkness, rigid, wakeful, each could feel the pressure of the other's thoughts. Betty finally broke the silence, in a voice so blunt that there was no mistaking her feeling.

"Ralph!"

"What?"

"Why did you act as you did in the laboratory?"

"Careful," muttered Welstead. "Maybe the room is wired for sound."

Betty laughed scornfully. "This isn't Earth. These people are trusting, honest. . . ."

It was Welstead's turn to laugh—a short cheerless laugh. "And that's the reason I'm ignorant when it comes to space-drive."

Betty stiffened. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that these people are too damn good to ruin."

Betty relaxed, sighed, spoke slowly, as if she knew she was in for a long pull. "How—'ruin'?"

Welstead snorted. "It's perfectly plain. You've been to their homes, you've read their poetry, listened to their music. . . ."

"Of course. These people live every second of their lives with—well, call it exaltation. A devotion to creation like nothing I've ever seen before!"

Welstead said somberly, "They're living in the grandest illusion ever imagined and they're riding for an awful fall. They're like a man on a glorious wine drunk."

Betty stared through the dark. "Are you crazy?"

"They're living in exaltation now," said Welstead, "but what a bump when the bubble breaks!"

"But why should it break?" cried Betty. "Why can't—"

"Betty," said Welstead with a cold sardonic voice, "have you ever seen a public park on Earth after a holiday?"

Betty said hotly. "Yes—it's dreadful. Because the people of Earth have no feeling of community."

"Right," said Welstead. "And these people have. They're knit very tightly by a compulsion that made them achieve in two hundred-odd years what took seven thousand on Earth. They're all facing in the same direction, geared to the same drive. Once that drive is gone how do you expect they'll hold on to their standards?"

Betty was silent.

"Human beings," said Welstead dreamily, "are at their best when the going's toughest. They're either at their best or else they're nothing. The going's been tough here—these people have come through. Give them a cheap living, tourist money—then what?"

"But that's not all. In fact it's only half the story. These people here," he stated with emphasis, "are living in a dream. They're the victims of the Ten Books. They take every word literally and they've worked their hearts out trying to come somewhere near what they expect the standards to be.

"Their own stuff doesn't do half the things to them that the Ten Books says good art ought to do. Whoever wrote those Ten Books must have been a copywriter for an advertising agency." Welstead laughed. "Shakespeare wrote good plays—sure, I concede it. But I've never seen 'fires flickering along the words, gusty winds rushing through the pages.'

"Sibelius I suppose was a great composer—I'm no expert on these things—but whoever listened and became 'part of Finland's ice, moss-smelling earth, hoarse-breathing forest,' the way the Ten Books said everyone did?"

BETTY said, "He was merely trying to express vividly the essence of the artists and musicians."

"Nothing wrong in that," said Welstead. "On Earth we're conditioned to call everything in print a lie. At least we allow for several hundred percent over-

statement. These people out here aren't immunized. They've taken every word at its face value. The Ten Books is their Bible. They're trying to equal accomplishments which never existed."

Betty raised herself up on an elbow, said in a voice of hushed triumph. "And they've succeeded! Ralph, they've succeeded! They've met the challenge, they've equaled or beaten anything Earth has ever produced! Ralph, I'm proud to belong to the same race."

"Same species," Welstead corrected dryly. "These people are a mixed race. They're all races."

"What's the difference?" Betty snapped. "You're just quibbling. You know what I mean well enough."

"We're on a sidetrack," said Welstead wearily. "The question is not the people of Haven and their accomplishments. Of course they're wonderful—*now*. But how do you think contact with Earth will affect them?"

"Do you think they'll continue producing when the challenge is gone? When they find the Earth is a rookery—nagging, quarreling—full of mediocre hacks and cheap mischief? Where the artists draw nothing but nude women and the musicians make their living reeling out sound, sound, sound—any kind of sound—for television sound-track. Where are all their dreams then?"

"Talk about disappointment, staleness! Mark my words, half the population would be suicides and the other half would turn to prostitution and cheating the tourists. It's a tough proposition. I say, leave them with their dreams. Let them think we're the worst sort of villains. I say, get off the planet, get back where we belong."

Betty said in a troubled voice, "Sooner or later somebody else will find them."

"Maybe—maybe not. We'll report the region barren—which it is except for Haven."

Betty said in a small voice, "Ralph, I couldn't do it: I couldn't violate their trust."

"Not even to keep them trusting?"

Betty said wildly, "Don't you think there'd be an equal deflation if we

sneaked away and left them? We're the climax to their entire two hundred and seventy-one years. Think of the listlessness after we left!"

"They're working on their space-drive," said Welstead. "Chances are a million to one against their stumbling on it. They don't know that. They've got a flicker of a field and they think all they have to do is adjust the power feed, get better insulation. They don't have the Mardi Gras lamp that Gladheim snatched up when the lead tank melted."

"Ralph," said Betty, "your words are all very logical. Your arguments stay together—but they're not satisfying emotionally. I don't have the feeling of rightness."

"Fish," said Welstead. "Let's not go spiritual."

"And," said Betty softly, "let's not try to play God either."

There was a long silence.

"Ralph?" said Betty.

"What?"

"Isn't there some way . . ."

"Some way to do what?"

"Why should it be *our* responsibility?"

"I don't know whose else it is. We're the instruments—"

"But it's *their* lives."

"Betty," said Welstead wearily, "here's one time we can't pass the buck. We're the people who in the last resort say yes or no. We're the only people that see on both sides of the fence. It's an awful decision to make—but I say no."

There was no more talking and after an unmeasured period they fell asleep.

THREE nights later Welstead stopped Betty as she began to undress for bed. She gave him a dark wide-eyed stare.

"Throw whatever you're taking into a bag. We're leaving."

Betty's body was rigid and tense, slowly relaxing as she took a step toward him. "Ralph . . ."

"What?" And she could find no softness, no indecision in his topaz eyes.

"Ralph—it's *dangerous* for us to go. If they caught us, they'd execute us—for utter depravity." And she said in a

murmur, looking away, "I suppose they'd be justified too."

"It's a chance we'll have to take. Just what we said the day we decided to land. We've got to die sometime. Get your gear and let's take off."

"We should leave a note, Ralph. Something . . ."

He pointed to an envelope. "There it is. Thanking them for their hospitality. I told them we were criminals and couldn't risk returning to Earth. It's thin but it's the best I could do."

A hint of fire returned to Betty's voice. "Don't worry, they'll believe it."

Suddenly she tucked a few trinkets into a pouch. "It's a long way to the ship you know," she warned him.

"We'll take Clay's car. I've watched him and I know how to drive it."

She jerked in a small bitter spasm of laughter. "We're even car thieves."

"Got to be," said Welstead stonily. He went to the door, listened. The utter silence of honest sleep held the rest of the house. He returned to where Betty stood waiting, watching him coldly with an air of dissociation.

"This way," said Welstead. "Out through the terrace."

They passed out into the moonless night of Haven and the only sound was the glassy tinkle of the little stream that ran in its natural bed through the terrace.

Welstead took Betty's hand. "Easy now, don't walk into that bamboo." He clutched and they froze to a halt. Through a window had come a sound—a gasp—and then the relieved mutter a person makes on waking from a bad dream.

Slowly, like glass melting under heat, the two came to life, stole across the terrace, out upon the turf beside the house. They circled the vegetable garden and the loom of the car bulked before them.

"Get in," whispered Welstead. "I'll push till we're down around the bend."

Betty climbed into the seat and her foot scraped against the metal. Welstead stiffened, listened, pierced the darkness like an eagle. Quiet from the

house, the quiet of relaxation, of trust. . . . He pushed at the car and it floated easily across the ground, resisting his hand only through inertia.

It jerked to a sudden halt. And Welstead froze in his tracks again. A burglar alarm of some sort. No, there were no thieves on Haven—except two recently-landed people from Earth. A trap?

"The anchor," whispered Betty.

Of course—Welstead almost groaned with relief. Every car had an anchor to prevent the wind from blowing it away. He found it, hooked it into place on the car's frame and now the car floated without hindrance down the leafy tunnel that was Clay's driveway. Around a bend he ran to the door, jumped in, pressed his foot on the power pedal, and the car slid away with the easy grace of a canoe. Out on the main road he switched on the lights and they rushed off through the night.

"And we still use wheels on Earth," said Welstead. "If we only had a tenth of the guts these people have—"

Cars passed them from the other direction. The lights glowed briefly into their faces and they cringed low behind the windscreen.

They came to the park where their ship lay. "If anyone stops us," Welstead said in Betty's ear, "we've just driven down to get some personal effects. After all we're not prisoners."

But he circled the ship warily before stopping beside it and then he waited a few seconds, straining his eyes through the darkness. But there was no sound, no light, no sign of any guard or human presence.

Welstead jumped from the car. "Fast now. Run over, climb inside. I'll be right behind you."

They dashed through the dark, up the rungs welded to the hull, and the cold steel felt like a caress to Welstead's hot hands. Into the cabin he thudded the port shut, slammed home the dogs.

Welstead vaulted to the controls, powered the reactors. Dangerous business—but once clear of the atmosphere they could take time to let them warm prop-

erily. The ship rose, the darkness and lights of Mytilene fell below. Welstead sighed, suddenly tired, but warm and relaxed.

Up, up—and the planet became a ball, and Eridanus two thousand nine hundred and thirty-two peered around the edge and suddenly, without any noticeable sense of boundary passed, they were out in space.

Welstead sighed. "Lord, what a relief! I never knew how good empty space could look."

"It looks beautiful to me also," said Alexander Clay. "I've never seen it before."

Welstead whirled, jumped to his feet.

CLAY came forward from the reaction chamber, watching with a peculiar expression Welstead took to be deadly fury. Betty stood by the bulkhead, looking from one to the other, her face blank as a mirror.

Welstead came slowly down from the controls. "Well—you've caught us in the act. I suppose you think we're treating you pretty rough. Maybe we are. But my conscience is clear. And we're not going back. Looks like you asked for a ride, and you're going to get one. If necessary—" He paused meaningfully.

Then, "How'd you get aboard?" and after an instant of narrow-eyed speculation, "And why? Why tonight?"

Clay shook his head slowly. "Ralph—you don't give us any credit for ordinary intelligence, let alone ordinary courage."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I understand your motives—and I admire you for them. Although I think you've been bull-headed putting them into action without discussing it with the people most directly concerned."

Welstead lowered his head, stared with hard eyes. "It's basically my responsibility. I don't like it but I'm not afraid of it."

"It does you credit," said Clay mildly. "On Haven we're used to sharing responsibility. Not diluting it, you under-

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stand, but putting a dozen—a hundred—a thousand minds on a problem that might be too much for one. You don't appreciate us, Ralph. You think we're soft, spiritless."

"No," said Welstead. "Not exactly—"

"Our civilization is built on adaptability, on growth, on flexibility," continued Clay. "We—"

"You don't understand just what you'd have to adapt to," said Welstead harshly. "It's nothing nice. It's graft, scheming sharpshooters, tourists by the million, who'll leave your planet the way a platoon of invading soldiers leaves the first pretty girl they find."

"There'll be problems," said Clay. His voice took on power. "But that's what we want, Ralph—problems. We're hungry for them, for the problems of ordinary human existence. We want to get back into the stream of life. And if it means grunting and sweating we want it. We're flesh and blood, just like you are."

"We don't want Nirvana—we want to test our strength. We want to fight along with the rest of decent humanity. Don't you fight what you think is unjust?"

Welstead slowly shook his head. "Not any more. It's too big for me. I tried when I was young, then I gave up. Maybe that's why Betty and I roam around the outer edges."

"No," said Betty. "That's not it at all, Ralph, and you know it. You explore because you like exploring. You like the rough and tumble of human contact just as much as anyone else."

"Rough and tumble," said Clay, savoring the words. "That's what we need on Haven. They had it in the old days. They gave themselves to it, beating the new world into submission. It's ours now. Another hundred years of nowhere to go and we'd be drugged, lethargic, decadent."

Welstead was silent.

"The thing to remember, Ralph," said

Clay, "is that we're part of humanity. If there's good going, fine. But if there are problems we want to help lick them. You said you'd given up because it was too big for you. Do you think it would be too big for a whole planet? Three hundred million hard honest brains?"

Welstead stared, his imagination kindled. "I don't see how—"

Clay smiled. "I don't either. It's a problem for three hundred million minds. Thinking about it that way it doesn't seem so big. If it takes three hundred brains three days to figure out a dodecahedron of quartz—"

Welstead jerked, looked accusingly at his wife. "Betty!"

She shook her head. "Ralph, I told Clay about our conversation, our argument. We discussed it all around, Ralph, and I told him everything—and I told him I'd give a signal whenever we started to leave. But I never mentioned space-drive. If they discovered it they did it by themselves."

Welstead turned slowly back to Clay. "Discovered it? But—that's impossible."

Said Clay, "Nothing's impossible. You yourself gave me the hint when you told me human reason was useless because the space-drive worked out of a different environment. So we concentrated not on the drive itself but on the environment. The first results came at us in terms of twelve directions—hence the dodecahedron. Just a hunch, an experiment and it worked."

Welstead sighed. "I'm licked. I give in. Clay, the headache is yours. You've made it yours. What do you want to do? Go back to Haven?"

Clay smiled, almost with affection. "We're this far. I'd like to see Earth. For a month, incognito. Then we'll come back to Haven and make a report to the world. And then there's three hundred million of us, waiting for the bell in round one."

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NEXT ISSUE'S HEADLINERS

THE SEED FROM SPACE, A Novel by Fletcher Pratt

LETTERS OF FIRE, a Short Novel by Mott Lee

BIRTHPLACE OF CREATION, a Captain Future Novolet by Edmond Hamilton



The backyard peddle becomes a pirate
100

Short Order

By SAM MERWIN, JR.

Enoch Jones, the wanderer, had been about everywhere there was to go—but he had traveled always in the same spot!

IT was time to close up the dog-wagon for the night. The hands of the dirty-faced clock on the wall yawned widely at five minutes of four. A cockroach moved slowly, tiredly, toward its nocturnal crack at the base of the wall. Molly, the stubby thick-bodied waitress, had already hung up her apron and departed for home—or wherever she

elected to unveil her sawed-off-shotgun charms.

Enoch Jones, the leathery bald-headed short-order cook, cleaned with professional care the long thin-bladed knife that was the chief instrument of his sandwich-cutting trade. He placed it carefully in its rack-slot above the back-bar, then turned to regard with mel-

ancholy disinterest the two burly blue-chinned Diesel truckmen who were the sole remaining customers.

"Closing up," he told them, his hands unfastening with the expertness of long practise the strings of his own white apron.

"Okay, pop," said one of them. His voice too bore the fuzz of bone-deep fatigue. "Just as soon as I get this java down."

Enoch Jones nodded and made a few half-hearted swipes at the top of the service-bar with a towel that had seen better days. Occasionally, at this time of the morning, it seemed to him that he had been going through this same routine with this same pair of truck drivers for at least a thousand years.

He thought wryly that sixty-two years could seem a lot longer than a thousand if you were the guy that lived them—always accepting the fact that you could call this a life. He felt his jaws crack in a yawn, made no effort to conceal it.

Outside a truck roared past without stopping. Enoch Jones had already turned off the bright red-and-yellow-and-green sign that proclaimed the presence of *Enoch's Diner—Tables, Pizza, Dancing*. He thought of putting a slug in the juke-box, decided against it. It might cause the Diesel drivers to linger.

Yes, sixty-two years could seem like a thousand-plus, Enoch Jones decided. Usually he didn't allow himself to think about it. He didn't think about much of anything any more—beyond the scant mental requirements of facing everyday existence.

He had long since learned that thought was the door-key to recollection—and recollection was the stairway to the attic of dusty and discarded and broken and outworn dreams. Dreams were things—if you could call them *things*—that Enoch Jones had long since decided were responsible for most of life's miseries.

ENOCH JONES had had his share of them—perhaps more than his share. His life, he thought when he al-

lowed himself to think along such lines, had been dominated by dreams ever since, at the age of five and a half, he had first imagined the backyard puddle that appeared with each February thaw to be a pirate sea, peopled by d'Olineux, Blackbeard, Captain Kidd—and paved with pirate bullion.

That particular dream, which invariably found him striding a rocking quarter-deck, cutlass in hand, defying mutineers and Spanish sea captains simultaneously, had not endured very long despite its vividness and satisfaction. For other dreams, each as vivid, each as satisfying, had followed one another with the years.

For awhile, after the backyard pirate sea dried up in the heat of early summer, Enoch Jones had been a cowboy with cattle-rustling variations, riding the wide loop and beating to the draw lank lace-ruffled gamblers amid the false-front dens of the Great Southwest.

He had been, in turn, big league baseball hurler, fireman, soldier, Hollywood star, football hero and—after a painful pre-adolescent brush with the facts of life—Wall Street financier. Each of these dreams, while it endured, had filled him utterly.

Ultimately, of course, one king-sized dream had come to erase the vigor of all others, to dominate his life. It had been born one Saturday afternoon in the local movie house when his age had barely reached double figures.

The space-ship, resting upright in its desert cradle, had been sleek, beautiful, dangerous, suggestive of the ultimate in unknown adventure. In blast-off it had been incredibly beautiful and if, in its journey through space to the Moon, the stars looked like pinpricks in a black velvet curtain, the ship itself had remained as sleek and suggestive as ever—especially in Technicolor.

It had been only a Hollywood fantasy—but with it Enoch Jones had soared free of the increasing encroachments of the dull commonplaces of living. From then on he was a spaceman—even though no scientist nor adventurer had yet even to approach the long talked-of

conquest of space.

Enoch Jones, a p a c e m a n — Enoch Jones, explorer of alien worlds—Enoch Jones, perhaps, ruler of some strange planet where no other human foot had trod, no other human voice been heard. This was the dream which, after the fashion of dreams, had come to be Enoch Jones—although perhaps it was the other way around.

This was the dream that refused to fade or be superseded in his imagination. In fact, the older he grew the more it came to occupy his thoughts asleep as well as awake. Gradually it began more and more to shape—or as his parents had implied—to infect his life.

Enoch Jones was not blessed in any wordly degree. His father was not rich—quite otherwise. Since there were half a dozen children and he was the second oldest he had to go to work early. He drifted from job to job, never able to rise in such careers as offered because his dream of space prevented sustained effort.

So he became a short-order cook. He knew he would never get rich behind a counter-bar—but he could do the work satisfactorily by rote once he had mastered its intricacies. More important, if man reached the planets in his lifetime, someone would have to cook for them there as well as on Earth.

Perhaps his logic was odd but it satisfied him. He even began to pile up a sizable amount of money in the bank out of his modest earnings. For if his dream prevented his rise in the world it also prevented his forming any of the usual ties, assuming any of the usual responsibilities that eat up a man's savings.

Marriage was not for him and the girls seemed to sense it. He did not starve for women since his desires were channeled otherwise and always some female around would find his self-pre-occupation a challenge. He did all right that way. No Miss Americas, perhaps, but then how many men did win beauty prizewinners?

"What's more," he used to say occasionally over a glass of whiskey with a beer chaser, "how many of them that

gets them like it after they're stuck with them?"

There was no answer to that one.

Enoch Jones got around a lot too. When he got tired of a job or the season turned sour he'd have his savings converted to Traveler's Checks and take off for a balmy clime. He knew his business and could get a job almost anywhere at any time. This, of course, was a planned factor in fulfillment of his dream.

He didn't care much for the cities. He liked to work the places between towns, the little demi-communities that have a way of springing up along the great highways alongside the filling and service stations, the places where the long-distance commercial drivers stop for refuelling of gas tanks as well as the inner man.

Yes, Enoch Jones got around. It was only after he had lost most of his hair and had his upper teeth replaced by a dental plate that the extent of his betrayal began to dawn on him. And by that time it was too late to do much about it.

ONE night, much like this one, when he stepped outside after closing up and looked up and down the highway, he had an odd impression that he was just a kid on his first job, working a few miles from the small dark-white homestead—the place with the spring puddle in the backyard from which his first dream had sprung.

"What's eatin' you, lover?" Birdie, the dark-roots blonde who had shared quarters with him in a shack behind the garage down the highway asked. "You look like you swallowed a herring bone."

"I'm okay," Enoch Jones replied. "I'm okay. Just thought of something. Come on, I got a quart of rye stashed at the house."

He had figured the whiskey would kill the thought that had troubled him. But it hadn't—and a few days later he had moved on to try somewhere else. He hadn't wanted to face it. But ultimately he had had to.

All the places he had been—and each one of them looked and sounded and smelt and tasted just like the rest. He had worked Miami, winter playground of the continent—and all he had seen of it were neon signs and gas stations and the inside of the dogwagon.

All he had heard was the rumble of truck drivers' slow chatter and the roar of their trucks as they rolled by on the concrete outside. All he had smelt was fuel and food odors—all he had tasted was dogwagon food and not-too-mellow whiskey and too-sweet lipstick.

It had been the same outside Seattle, on Route 66, near Greenwich, Connecticut, on the Montreal-Quebec Highway and on the main drag beyond Phoenix, Arizona. He had been places, yes—about as many as a man had a right to get—but he might as well have seen, have been in only one.

Enoch Jones had begun to show his age once this thought attained the reaches of his conscious mind. He knew he had lost it, lost whatever it was that kept him going so long. There were no more Birdies for him—the Mollys, being women, knew he had lost it with no questions asked. Yet he hadn't been able to stop. The habits acquired in a lifetime held him chained to knife and apron.

He looked at the dirty-faced clock on the wall, saw that it was now one minute of four. "Come on, fellows," he said to the two truck drivers. "I need some shut-eye."

"Okay, pop." The one who had first spoken yawned widely, nudged the shin of his companion with his heavy boot. "We got to be goin' ourselves. See you next trip, old timer."

"So long, pop—give that Molly a smooch for me." The other driver, grinning, was on his feet. They brought their cups over to the bar-counter to save him an extra trip. They were good boys, Enoch Jones thought. They clumped on out into the night, buttoning their heavy felt coveralls and pulling on their thick boots. A blast of nostril-stinging air accompanied their exit.

Enoch Jones turned off all but the night light and got into his own heavy

outer garments. It was cold enough outside to freeze the tail off a brass elephant and he was too old to enjoy it, especially when he was bone tired. The hundred and fifty yards to the two rooms he had in back of the filling station seemed like miles.

He set the lock on the door and slammed it behind him and paused outside, nerving himself for the walk to his waiting bed. The roar of a Diesel motor, catching with difficulty in the cold of the night, made him jump. He lifted an arm in salute as his two recent customers rolled past, sodium headlights slicing the darkness in eerie death-yellow trim streamers.

He looked around him before beginning his walk to shelter. Most of the bright neon signs were darkened for the remainder of the night. But Hogan, who ran the roadhouse—by courtesy only—this side of the filling station, still had his signs glowing. And the big billboards lined the highway spottily, advertising their various products, from digestion aids to cold cures to tires to hotels.

It was cold but there was no snow—there never was in this crazy climate. Enoch Jones was grateful for that. Snow would have made his walk that much the harder. He began to slog off, past Hogan's to the filling station and bed, reflecting on the foolishness to which a man's dreams could drive him.

He kept his head down—for even here on Mars he was sick of the fading ribbons that were highways in the night, sick of neon signs and dogwagons and roadhouses and filling stations and two-room shacks in which he no longer could live alone from choice.

"I never got anywhere after all," he muttered as the cold made his nostrils stiff and a gust of wind all but stopped him in his tracks. "Not anywhere at all in spite of all my travels."

He didn't even look up at the twin moons above him—for at best Deimos and Phobos were dull and tiny satellites and in the bright glare of electricity, neon tubing and sodium lamps they were scarcely visible at all.

THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from Page 6)

eliminating the strong and allowing the weak to live on.

Perhaps the dodo was lucky to last as long as it did, thanks to its conlong isolation from destructive forces in Tasmania. But the chihuahua and the pekinese have maintained themselves through adaptability—in both instances through cooperation with man, a dominant species. And the wolf, a far better equipped canine species, has been driven to the Northland wastes by his refusal thus to cooperate.

To date humanity has not had to adjust to a symbiotic or other relationship with a better-equipped species—but he is having the devil's own time adjusting to himself in any reasonable sort of relationship at all. Fortunately not all of our basic urges seem to be competitive and therefore destructive.

Examples of Sacrifice

History contains far more examples of sacrifice, from Damon and Pythias to Father Damien, than it does of ruthless exploitation in the name of security for the individual. Our species has survived such human scourges as Atilla, Alexander, Genghis Khan, Napoleon and Adolph Hitler only through this fundamental desire to live in peace with itself.

Further proof of the greater inherent strength of those who give rather than those who take—apart from the cataclysms of war and nature—is quickly evident to anyone who takes the trouble to make a survey of the obituary columns of his local newspaper. Granted, only notables of more or less degree get the write-ups. But notables (whatever they are) can supply us with convincing proof as readily as greater masses of the more obscure.

Day by day, week by week, we find obits written anent the passing of driving individuals who have forced and forged their way to the top in the competitive world of business. Over a period of one month we discovered the average age of these hard-hitting aggressors, at their passing, to be just a shade under fifty years.

Across the same period we noted and listed the professors, artists, physicians and other folk who had attained distinction in ways that were directly beneficial to the communities in which they lived. They

lived on an average some sixteen years longer than their ulcer-building rivals. And the work they did represents something a lot more solid if, perhaps, less tangible than whatever shares of A.T.&T. common the competitors left in their private vaults.

To be personally aggressive a man must live in a world enclosed by the radius of his own wants, ambitions and personality. If he be generous such generosity can only spring from the need of his ego to be admired. He is very much a man in prison—and prison restrictions have never fostered survival.

Living for a Purpose

It is our well-founded hunch that survival for its own sake is not survival at all but is rather the road to quick destruction. It is not, actually, even a basic human instinct save in situations of physical duress (and even here the records of our saints and war heroes prove otherwise)—not, that is, if we are to consider man a reasoning being. It seems more closely allied to the popular concept of the pig, another much-maligned animal.

Nor is such aggressive egoism fundamentally evil—for evil implies deliberate attempt to harm others and the urge to preserve self at all costs is merely a form of panic. It is rather a negation of the whole purpose and history of humanity. Worse, it is ultimately as suicidal as anything the lemmings have shown our observers in their supposedly mad mass race for the North Sea.

If we are to survive at all in this more or less hapless age we must seek to live for some purpose outside of ourselves. This, it seems to us, is our only remaining hope. We may not be the "fittest" if we do—but at least we shall be the survivors.

ETHERGRAMS

THE reader contributions seem to us unusually live and controversial this month. What with the windup of our own personal race (racist?) controversy and sundry other matters, the weeding out process has not been easy. In fact the de-

partment threatens to run to greater length than we intended. So let's get to it with—

SUGGESTION

by L. Lockhart Layton

Dear Ed: I would like to make a request. In spite of your reluctance toward printing facts in a magazine dedicated to fiction I think it is an excellent idea. Many scientific facts and theories at first glance appear to be much stranger than fiction and are often more entertaining to one who enjoys a bit of mental exercise. I would like to see a department in your mag dedicated to strange and little-known facts of science . . . scientific puzzles, paradoxes, and mysteries. It seems obvious that there are many important bits of information lying unused because they have not been called to the attention of the right person.

Of course I am not suggesting that you start an inventors' clinic. I'm just trying to point out that such a department would have great possibilities. I would like to issue a challenge to other readers. Send in any unusual bits of information you may possess and let's see if we can make something of it. It may be something that is considered detrimental to some process or it may be something that is considered absolutely needless. Whatever it is let's talk it over and see if we can turn it to some advantage. How about some letters?

I am personally interested in electricity, magnetism and gravity. There are a lot of questions to be answered about those subjects. Anyway they tell me that is how science progresses—by asking questions and searching for answers. Any one can do it. You don't need a degree or an expensive laboratory, just a normal amount of curiosity and ambition.—1101 Harvard Street, Vancouver, British Columbia.

We may be asking for it, L. Lockhart, but we like your idea—that is, of course, if it appeals to sufficient number of readers to get action. A department devoted to questions and answers of scientific and scientific interest has possibilities.

Furthermore, we believe it should be up to the readers to answer the questions sent in and published. Therefore, for the first couple of issues, if such contributions appear, we will run them in a questionbox. Then, when, as and if we get answers, we will re-run the earlier questions and the best explanations as well as a new set of questions per issue. This should keep everyone up to date as well as scratching for new answers.

Now all we need is a title. Let's see—how about SS READER QUIZ? That ought to do it. You want to know what rhodomagnetics are, how to peel a tesseract without a knife, why is a parsec? Send us your question on a separate piece of paper (include your answer too if you have one) and we'll run it and let the rest of the interested readers do their worst. Thanks

for the idea, L. Lockhart. Let's hope we can get something under way.

GET ANOTHER MAN

by Edwin James

Dear Mr. Editor: An author can stand a great many things, but there is always a sticking point. Dorothy Parker recites a list of insults which would not move her, then adds:

"But say my verses do not scan,
And I get me another man!"

Mr. Robert Marlow, who writes in your November, 1950, issue, should not have said that my story "Communications" (Sept., 1949) was illogical, although he was perfectly within his rights as reader and critic to find it "uninteresting." The latter adjective is subjective in application but the former is capable of proof or disproof.

Mr. Marlow quotes so admirably in support of his contention that physical transfer of messages on ships traveling faster than light would be faster than radio-waves, since electromagnetic waves are restricted to the speed of light, he might well have quoted yet another passage a little farther on in the story:

" . . . Each signal is given a surcharge of energy from the same engines which send this ship into hyper-flight. Since the difference in mass is enormous, the speed of the signal is incalculable and the transmission time can be measured in seconds." (p. 110)

This, of course, has the support of no living scientific authority, but one would suppose that the speed of light limit is no more restricting on electromagnetic waves than on matter. The theory has, in addition, the elementary logic that a given force will propel a lighter object faster than a heavier one.

My only interest in this aspect of the story, of course, was in providing a suitable and logical background for my consideration of the future of cryptography and its place of eminence in a war between two interstellar foes of equal power.—1420 Massachusetts Street, Lawrence, Kansas.

Cheer up, Edwin, we liked COMMUNICATIONS too or we would never have purchased and published it. And it seems to us we rallied round to its defense back in the November SS very much along the lines you suggest above. Here's luck with your M.A. degree (we'd like to see the thesis) and hoping for reams of redhot copy in the months and years to come.

LEY OF THE LAST MARLOW

by James K. Powell

Dear Editor: One of life's little problems turns up again, a problem that always leaves me with a feeling of disappointment. Muddled thinking. Robert Marlow (N do P?) has indulged in it a bit in his letter published in the November issue of SS. When Mr. Ley replies, if he condescends to, either Mr. Marlow will learn one small fact or he will blow the now-famous lid.

Mr. Ley, I am happy to say, was not confused. If my Handbook of Chemistry and Physics is not confused also on this point the surface acceleration of gravity at Vancouver, British Columbia, elevation in meters; 6, is 980.733 g cm/sec², approximately 32 feet/sec². By Mr. Marlow's own definition, "One gravity of acceleration is equal to a velocity gain of 32 ft/sec² . . ."

Were it not for this constant surface acceleration Robert Marlow (N de P) would be floating free somewhere in space. So much for your zero acceleration at the surface of our world.

I have learned to read the Letters first and for this reason my letters to you cannot have a rating of all the stories. In this issue even a partial rating might be more informative than none.

Novelists	Average
Tough Old Man—L. Ron Hahhard . . .	5.25
Short Stories	
Love My Robot—Rog Phillips	6.50
Road Block—Roh't Moore Williams . . .	4.75
Tall Tale—Mack Reynolds	3.00
Ethergrams rated about .45 on the basis of 1.00 equals perfection.	

I rated these stories on a personal system, don't we all? I use four points in judging all stories, rating from 1 to 10 on the arbitrary points of characterization, plot, development and ending. The average is the rating, my own. However the dialect in Tall Tale was above average and I thought it only fair to say so.

I wish to say that I have enjoyed SS for several years, whenever I could find a copy. The serious lack of stf south of Panama has obliged me to catch up on my reading while in the States and not spend my time writing letters. I will close now as I have a great amount of reading to catch up on.

One last comment, an echo to your devastating aside to that stf-illiterate Rick Dykeman, even I know a little about Isaac Asimov and not entirely from the professional angle.

I will try to say hello personally the next time I am in New York if it is at all possible. The idea, new to me, that I might be admitted to the sacred precincts of the editorial offices just never entered my head before you pointed it out in the Nov. issue of SS. Thank you for your great patience with just another of the reader-fans, and his epistolary efforts.—*Ber No. 355, SRSC, Alpine, Texas.*

Thanks, James K., and we shall look forward to receiving a visit from you here in the foreseeable future. Poor Marlow—he seems to be getting it from all sides. But is he downhearted? Let him speak for himself.

N DE P

by Robert Marlow

Dear Ed: I still don't agree with James on the subject of his high speed radio. In science fiction we have a medium known as space wave, which is a super speeded-up form of radio. This, however, is not radio and should not be called such. Pass this information on to Edwin James if you please.

As for Willy Ley, I hope he answers my let-

ter with all his fury, for I love to argue when I have proof positive of my side of the "battle."

You probably have realized that (N. de P.) is my own original contraction for the words "nom de plume," by now, but if you haven't connected that stupid manuscript that you rejected two months ago with me then I will let you know that Robert Marlow is the nom de plume for Robert W. McKay. (That's me.)

Do you know that this last issue of yours is very good. Your feature novel was so sound in plot and so well written that I could hardly believe that the story wasn't written by A. E. van Vogt or Robert A. Heinlein. The rest of the material was good reading. I suppose it was to be expected, for every one of your writers has appeared before in a leading science fiction magazine.

Your editorial was quite interesting this month. I am also glad to see the revisions you have made in your fanzine dept. Now to get down to discussing Ethergrams. I would like to see more poetry in the column. (I use the term loosely.)

I think that Jack Vance is better at writing stories other than his Magnus adventures. Don't you agree? You said that Honolulu is more of a race melting pot than Los Angeles in your answer to the letter by Bill Morris. I am not an authority on either of these places (I'm not an authority on anything, would be more correct) but I have inside information that the big airport in Newfoundland, Canada, sees at least one man from almost every country, every day. They don't live there but they are there momentarily, same thing. (Almost.)

I believe that this ridiculous controversy over the Negro question should not be allowed to go any further. Any human being in his (or her) right mind that would stoop to throw insults at another living human being because of skin color should be downright ashamed of himself (or herself!).

Who is the white man? If someone told me I was a white man I would hurry to see my doctor for I would certainly be ill. That is the only time I am ever white and I am very rarely ill so what more can I say. Albinos are white but they are rare. If Edwin Sigler is referring to the light-skinned race I see no reason why we should be proud. We (The light-skinned) have accomplished most because we have suppressed the other races and prevented them from getting anywhere.

Take a look at George Washington Carver. He was a Negro, and one of the greatest organic scientists in the history of the United States. In Canada, we have many Chinese and Japanese people who put the average "light-skinned person," to shame when it comes to ambition and accomplishment. You find very few of these "Yellow Men and Women" who end up on "Skid row." Is it any wonder?

Rick Dykeman wants to know about Isaac Asimov, does he? Here's what I know about the chap. He has written many stories for many of your (Better Publications) competitors. He also is listed with Edmond Hamilton, L. Sprague de Camp, Ray Cummings, Jack Williamson and others as among leading S. F. authors at the NYCON. (Consult your NORWESCON program.)

I say, my Friends, is Wonder Story Annual printed in Canada? I haven't seen it anywhere. Sorry I couldn't get down to see you all at

the Norwegian. I hope I can see you at NOLA-CON.

Now to poetry: Aha! A limerick.

*An artist named Bergey, so daring,
Paints a woman who little is wearing,
His aliens are green,
But his fem is a queen,
So for Pete's sake my friend, who is caring?*

*I like to see our Vogt in print,
His stories have a charming tint,
So print lots of them now
For I love 'em, and how!
Can't you so-and-so's please take a hint?*

Recently, in a leading magazine there was a delightful story about the flying saucers from Venus and how they utilized magnetic force as a means of propulsion. I hoped that you had read the article for it would truly let you know that the flying saucer doesn't belong to the United States.—*Invermere, British Columbia.*

Okay, Robert, we are winding up the race business this issue as promised. But you have to bring up them saucers, to wit—

*No flying saucer have we seen
In air so blue or sea so green
But should we see one up above
We'll send it on its way with love.*

And, by way of returning to the limerick form—

*Herr Marlow would like us to float
An issue made up of van Vogt
For Heinlein or Kuttner
Or anyone subtler
He will not fork over a goat.*

Which would seem to be about enough of that. Sorry, Willy Ley has not poked his heavy spectacles into the argument as yet.

NOTHING TO FOOL WITH by L. L. Shepherd

Dear Editor: This letter is motivated primarily by two sentences in your fine thoughtful editorial in the November issue. I consider these few lines answer the age-old question, "Is there any true worth in reading science fiction?" better than anything I have read on the subject.

I shall quote them: ". . . science fiction is nothing for the ward-heeler type of mentality to fool with and remain a competent corrupt human instrument. It does have a cathartic effect upon the dogma-packed mind. . . ." And that, as you say, is the finest thing that can be said of it.

The proof that this is true is exemplified in the contents of the letters of Edwin Sigler and Dorothy Brown-Nalls, in this issue. It is a basic human trait to defend most ardently those things we want to believe, yet about which we have many doubts. The fact of having doubts must be preceded by glimmerings of "wider" thinking. Intelligent sustained thinking is the nemesis of all dogma.

It is clear that Sigler hasn't been reading science fiction—nor been forced to think widely—for very long a time. His letter shows he is well versed in certain dogmas. To my way of thinking dogmatic beliefs are only a polite name for prejudices that have nothing to do with the color of one's skin.

His statement, "our culture was built by the white man," is not correct. It is much more correct to state that white men conceived, in the Constitution of the United States, in this nation a method for collecting, improving and co-relating the knowledge of all the races of the world into a usable form that would not, as long as it was strictly abided by, become the tail that wagged the dog as all other forms of government had done from time immemorial.

Under it all men, in this nation alone, achieved a freedom never before known to man by the elimination of dogmas . . . and their result, prejudice, from influence in their government. He was correct to some extent in his reference to "aliens." However, it would have been nearer right to have said, the "alien-minded" have made remarkable progress in destroying these things through their ignorant dogmatic teachings that have led to prejudice.

Dorothy states her case very well. However, she neglects to mention the one thing that I have felt is the answer to the Negro's complaint of "lack of opportunity." Exponents of the Negro's cause would do well to drum on these facts as well as their current "pet themes." The lot of the northern Negro is far superior to that of the average "poor-white" in the South. The lot of the downtrodden Negro of the South is far superior to that of the average "poor-white" or native in most foreign nations. . . . !

In addition the Negro has progressed from slavery to comparative freedom in less than one hundred years in this nation. The envied white man, that is so guilty of prejudice against the Negro, has only been able to achieve "opportunity and freedom" for himself, in the being of the "average man," in the last three hundred years—and then only in the U. S. A. Else, why should there have been and still be, the huge influx of immigrants?

It couldn't have been the "wilderness" that made it the "land of opportunity." A comparable "wilderness" lies mostly unsettled in the continent to the south of us. The modern conveniences of our present culture, and the inducements offered by the governments that rule those lands, are far superior to those available during the first two hundred years to immigrants to this nation.

Therefore one can only conclude that the dogmas and their resultant prejudice that are strictly in control of the established governments of these lands, make them undesirable, even to the "alien-minded" that are so busy in this nation. And, that if the Constitution of the United States was in effect there as it is here, the modern-day wagon trains would be rolling South as they did to the West.

I doubt if the Editor will print this. However, if he does I wish to add this thought—I have become more tolerant with age. However, there is an old saying, "A man changes his face often but he seldom changes his heart." Therefore, I find my feelings are not always what I would like them to be. The effort is

having its effect—at least in my part of the world. The white kids of today, and the "different" ones too, are much more tolerant than they were even twenty-odd-years ago when I was in school.

I'll conclude this letter with a plea . . . let us all read the wide clear there-are-greater-things-than-man type of reading such as one finds in science fiction—that causes the ". . . esthetic effect upon dogma-packed minds . . ." And, remember, although it is not perfect, as are not the parents of today . . . it is contagious to others, as demonstrated by the tolerance of the kids of today.—Post Office Box No. 193, Litchfield, Illinois.

A letter whose honesty almost hurts, Mr. Shepheard—and thanks incidentally for the small nod to our editorial. If we have helped in any way, directly or indirectly, to widen your heart we are grateful. But somehow we suspect that it needs little widening. We hope your plea finds wide response among our other readers.

NORTH CAROLINA LETTER

by M. C. Taylor

Dear Editor: I agree with you that the racial issue doesn't belong in an STF magazine. Nor do I think it belongs in Congress. It belongs to the people. What they do with it is a different matter.

I was born in the South and raised in the South and I'm darned tired of people talking as if the South was a foreign country. It seems to me that people could remember that the "War" is long over. All you can hear now is "the racial situation." I'm sick of it. I wish they would forget the "Race" part of it and dwell on the actual situations.

It isn't just the Negroes that have fared badly. They simply have the largest population. What about the Indians? What about all the rest of the supposedly inferior races?

I've seen good for nothing Negroes, Indians, Chinese and what have you. But, Mr. Editor, I've seen some of the most good for nothing whites too. Okay so what? Well here's what. During the last war there were Indian heroes, Negro heroes etc. Ralph Bunche is certainly not a man to be ashamed of. Bravery, commonsense and just plain decency know no color line, nor do shiftness, laziness and outright meanness, Bigots, fanatics, heroes and plain damn fools come in all colors, shapes and ages.

I'm white and of course I'm proud of it, but not far down the road lives a man just as black as the inside of a coal bin and he's no less proud of it. Why shouldn't he be proud? Why shouldn't I? We were both born that way.

If every person would let every other person stand on his own and not on his ancestors or church or color or what have you, my what a nice world we would have!

I think I would like to know Dorothy Brown-Nalla. She sounds like a real person. My best wishes to her.

As for Edwin Sigler—all I can say is a great big NUTS. It's people like him that ruin this world with their narrowmindedness. I would not like my children to marry into another race, no. But not because of the color or race

but because the people like Mr. Sigler would make their lives a miserable existence.

Because in a society filled with such people there would be no room for their children. Perhaps some day there will be tolerance, (I don't like that word, it speaks of condescension) let me say understanding, in the world. Until then I say forget the race or Negro issue and remember the HUMAN SITUATION.

Equality be darned, let's be friends. Until there is true friendship between the people no law can force equality.

Well I've got that off my mind and I'm glad. I'll keep on reading your mag and I'm not saking what color are your authors either. Just keep the good stories coming.—P.O. Box 81, Arapahoe, North Carolina.

Another large ladleful of honesty and from-the-heart speaking, Mr. Taylor. You echo our own feelings in this highly important and highly delicate matter—even to dislike of the word "tolerance," which to us has always implied the act of enduring while loathing. Agreed—you can't make people's behavior improve by any sort of sumptuary legislation. Prohibition proved that obvious truth for the millionth time at vast communal expense. Education to acceptance without distaste of the fact and foibles of others is the only answer. And we have a hell of a long way to go along that road, bub.

ANTHROPOLOGY SPEAKS by Phillip Barker

Dear sir: As a fourth-year student in anthropology here at the University of Washington, may I insert a few comments into this race discussion? Mr. Sigler's remarks have raised such a turmoil in science-fiction that we hear reverberations clear out here in Washington. Actually Mr. Sigler's statements have nothing to do with fiction—and certainly less to do with science.

However, Mr. Sigler supports scientific achievement—"the race that dares to dream of the stars." If so, then he will be interested in several scientific books, written by men who have made a life-long study of race and culture. May I refer him to Boas, "The Mind of Primitive Man"; Kroeber, "Race Differences"; and to "The Fallacy of Race" (I cannot recall the author.)

The substance of those books is as follows: (1) There is no race but the human race. (2) National boundaries and linguistic boundaries are not racial boundaries. (3) Differences between races are based solely upon different environments and different adaptations of this very versatile human animal. (Just think, Mr. Sigler, if your ancestors had gone south instead of north way back in the Pleistocene, you would have probably been as dark-skinned as the people you claim to despise!) (4) A person from another racial group, brought up without prejudice in our western environment will be a person of western culture, entirely, completely. (5) The "stupidity" and "laziness" of the American Negro is not due to race but is due to the low class he is kept in by the forces

of prejudice and hatred! (6) A Negro (or a Chinese or an Australian bushman) can rise to the same intellectual heights as any white person (on the average) if his environment and background is the same as that of the white members of the community. This is amply proven by the Brazilian race mixing-pot, which lacks race-prejudice and gives the same opportunities to both Negroes and whites.

Now then, you make mention of interracial marriage. From all scientific findings, sir, the only taint or stigma upon children born of two races is the taint placed upon them by prejudiced individuals in our culture!

You neglect the obvious factor of cultural drive differences. These have nothing to do with race. They are simply the peculiar drive or direction in which one culture chooses to excel.

Right now we are involved in a mechanical-scientific cultural drive ever increasing our knowledge concerning machines and natural laws. But five hundred years ago a mechanic was one who dabbled in magic and the drive of those days was religion, religion, religion.

Each culture has its rise, its heights, its decline, and its fall, and each one excels in different things. These are not due to race. At one time, for example, the Chinese were the recognized scientific masters of the world. At another time the Arab world held the scientific reins. Before them were the Greeks, before them the Egyptians. At one time the purely Negro culture of Benin held prominence in the science of metal working.

Cultural drives change regardless of race or religion. Can't you see, sir, that our modern culture is just an outgrowth of the drive for understanding of natural laws, which started long ago in pre-Egyptian times and has been handed on from culture to culture, from race to race, like Prometheus' fire? Who knows where it will go next? Perhaps, as L. Sprague de Camp has theorized, it will go to Brazil. I would offer India as a possibility.

I am sorry to have thus taken up the editor's time, but as a magazine which deals with science, I feel that a little anthropology is not at all out of place. Now I should like to rate the stories.

"The Five Gold Bands"—Superb! Vance is excellent. "Tough Old Man"—a long way below the above but still pretty good. "Road Block"—pretty good writing and plot. "Love My Robot"—entertaining. "Pardon My Iron Nerves"—no comment. Hamilton, how could you? "Tall Tale"—stick this in a separate category. Mack Reynolds is a new writer and ought not to be forced to compete against the old masters. I enjoyed the story and want to see more of him but of course he has a pretty tough line-up to run against.—559 South Stevens Street, Tacoma 8, Washington.

A nice hot letter with points well taken if a trifle diffuse in spots. And the stuff about ancient cultural drives especially intriguing. Makes us wonder about those immense and ornate South African ruins, built by heaven-knows-who, and the vast black basalt water-city of Penape, whose creators have yet to be assigned by archeology. Maybe one of them was white but we doubt it.

THE A-RUT

by Es & Les Cole

Dear Snark: You old shrewdy, you! Putting the Sigler letter into print. You knew darn well that it would send up the blood pressures of thousands of people all over the country. Do you realize what it has done to us? It is going to elicit from us an answer—really a futile thing.

We've indulged in these unproductive discussions before; God knows how many times. We've heard all the arguments, and we've probably heard all the answers; we attended Cal, where if all the ideas on religion, politics and sex have not been expressed, it's only because they are dead. The discussions are unproductive because the Gibsons can only nod agreement while the Siglers you couldn't touch with a ten-foot pole. (You couldn't even touch 'em with the eleven-foot pole constructed for people you couldn't touch with a ten-footer.) The Siglers remain secure in their Aristotelian rut. We've never yet heard of one being converted. . . . and we doubt if one could be.

What Sigler needs is a course in basic nexialism, say Nexialism 2AB; the whole-ism of the interrelationship of human cultures. We find it an item of regret that another human being is incapable of appreciating the art, music, mores and food (though possibly not including Calameres) of other groups of the species.

But to the meat: why do these people always make a religious pilgrimage out of the argument? Inasmuch as we haven't had a private discussion with the "Living God" lately, we feel singularly unqualified to comment on what ideas are expressed in religious dogma. This business of throwing "Hims" and "His" and "holy" (words, we might add, with a purely emotional subjective meaning) into the argument might help to convince a religious person; there is no sense in pointing out how the other side feels about it, especially those interested in general semantics!

Skipping, however, the controversial-unprovable material, we ask what in the name of the Living God is a white man? Sigler has him building our culture, and we would be quite interested in knowing who he is. Who are the aliens who are tearing it down? These questions are very important to us; we have to know at whom to direct our righteous anger. The last we heard the evil hordes directed from Moscow were tearing down our culture, but we slept late last night and there may have been a significant change.

It fascinates us, our culture. We are certainly glad to know it was built by the "white man." We always thought it had its roots in Egypt, China, the Near East and the Mediterranean basin. We'd always considered its origins in Greek politics, Roman culture and conquest, Spanish and Portuguese exploration and lately English imperialism. We're certainly glad to know that a large portion of American folk music is white, including such material as "Casey Jones", "Oh, Dem Golden Slippers", "Swing Low, Sweet Charlotte" etc.

Or perhaps Mr. Sigler refers to our peculiarly American form of "materialism". We refuse to comment on that; we'll let a better man do it for us. See Phil Wylie, practically anything of social significance he has written.

There were many tests made to determine whether there is a basic difference in "intelligence" between "Negro" and "white". While we won't bore you with details—Sigler can find the scoop in any elementary psych. text if he is able to read—the results, of course, were negative.

Tak, tak, kiddo, you put one of your pedal extremities in it again. Picking on poor Muriel Baxter that-a-way. May we quote? "... before we get under way. Quell chore!" (Page 153) That one drove us to the small dictionary with the following results—quell, V. I. t. 1. To cause to cease or yield by force; put down; subdue.

2. To cause to subside; calm; mollify; quiet; allay, as pain. 3. To kill.

II. t. 1. To yield; subside. 2. To die.

"Quell", old dear, is from the Anglo-Saxon "weellan", die. As if you didn't know! We just wish we had a big dictionary too. But there is more—

quell, n. 1. (Poet. or Obs.) A weapon or other means of subduing or quelling; power to subdue. 2. Murder.

That last is a most fitting climax to the discussion, but so help us we didn't plan it that way. What you should do is can your proof readers. Or stop trying to be so fatuous. By the way, the correct form is either *quell* or *quella*.—3640 1/2 Adeline St., Berkeley 3, Calif.

Tak, tak, yourselves. And here all this time we have been wandering about in our innocence, believing serialism something the Grik Gods drank out of a shoehorn or something. Shades of L. Sprague de Camp! Your racism requires no answer. (Those big dictionary quests are fun occasionally—especially as almost always something turns up as fitting as your *quelling with murder*. Which is why we indulge once in a while.

As to your comment anent some of our other activities as against our editorial capabilities (carefully deleted from your letter) we feel in somewhat the same mood as Edwin James a few letters back. However, the story in question was, to us, a horrifying thing when we finally saw it in print. We shuddered. By then it had been thoroughly butchered in the process of cutting it to fit an overdue rent bill. Maybe you'll find something happier in work soon to appear in this and other stf magazines.

SIDEWINDERS PREFERRED

by John P. Conlon

Dear Editor: I returned from Europe in forty-five after an argument with some gent who included in their ranks a corps of lads selected for size, race, appearance and so forth. Unfortunately they used to make soap and lampshades of their customers. The SS Trooper was a carefully selected person but I would a damn sight sooner associate with a mojave sidewinder. With all their hollering over the race question they wound up allowing the Nips,

Krim Tatars, Mongols, Hungarians, Rumanians and so forth to be honorary Aryans.

As for dreaming of the stars the heathen Chinese had good observatories while many of our ancestors were using each other for chow purposes. They ain't made many changes in the world but they ain't having conscience pains from making A-bombs.

There are differences in outward appearance among the various races of man but the basic equipment is the same. A lot of prejudices arise from relations between the man with the whip and the pore working stiff. The only real alien today is the Communist, whose behavior is alien to any civilization except the New Guinea cannibal.

I soldiered in the Regular Army with a group of men who represented all the tribes of Europe. I enlisted with an old soldier of the Irish Republican Army and what I know about the Service I learned from a Lithuanian corporal. As for filth, there was a lad in my unit down South whose color was hard to tell—until his squad leader and a couple of guys with sensitive noses escorted him to the shower with a G.I. brush. There ain't any inferior races—only inferior individuals.—53 Columbia Street, Newark, Ohio.

And that, as they say, is telling them, Mr. Conlon. At any rate it will serve to wind up this turned-on toaster of a symposium that has been raging ever since Mr. Sigler replied in heat to Mr. Joe Gibson's letter in answer to Miss Lopez's note in our March issue—which is long enough for any controversy to endure in a letter column—especially when it has nothing directly to do with stf. Thanks for the letters, all of you who did not get into print. We're right proud of you-all.

HEADS DOWN!

by Joe Gibson

Dear Ed: Whup! Keep your heads down, boys! She's a leetle rough in through here—Wherempon I crawl, wriggle and mod-paddle up to the O.P. of Eugene DeWesse, who shall henceforth be called Indiana. Now Indiana sez we ought not to make TEV a battleground. I agree. I got an allergy to battlegrounds. I am sure Corporal McLamarrah, Canck Moose, Ollie Shannon and one of the Coles, at least, will happily join me in a round of five-card poker in the nearest liberated distillery, gasthaus or Bier-keller. Are you there, Lee?

It all places me in a somewhat golden mood of reminiscence. Please, Lemuel, leave me indulge myself for this nonce. 'Twas maybe fifteen, maybe twenty years ago that the letter-columns of the stf mags were all-male to a vast and nauseating degree, with only one letter or so every few months from any female stf reader.

So a bunch of guys of high and noble intellect devised a bit of nefarious witticism. Ye commented to Ye Eds that science-fiction was obviously a man's bailiwick, that women just couldn't enjoy it because there were no frills or fripples, that the one or two old maids who did hang around were probably just

out on bail anyhow. We were brave lads in those days!

And gazooks!—did we get our ears pinned back! And man, oh man, did we love it! Ever since then, somehow or other, the gals have always been around. Femmes like la belle Zimmerman-Bradley, whose merrie-maying 'mongst the general repartee has always been welcomed with loud huzzahs from us Knights of the Round Table. Much, I hope, to her sheer feminine delight. But—now, isn't that people for you?

And for youngsters like Shelby Vick of Florida, let me say there are as many beautiful dames among stfeccionados as he'll find on any local beach. Or, well, it just might be the conditions in Florida. That state's a catch-all for broad-beamed tourists, anyway. Reminds me somewhat of New Jersey. All the pretty tourists are out West!

But to have one's letter published in a letter-column, one usually must expect certain results. Some mail-order houses put your name and address on their sucker list but they usually scratch it off after twenty or thirty come-hither circulars are ignored. A good thing, though, is that you certainly get an opportunity to acquire any stf stories you've missed and always wanted. Fandom is chock-full of crazed collectors and eager dealers.

Also, there are the good fellows. Shannon, now, has read stf for twenty years—and is this his first letter to TEV? I wonder if he's ever sat down with a good fellow to recall those old Weinbaum days when heroes went jumping into space without spacesuits, holding their breath, and all the first-trippers to the Moon found weird intelligent creatures and flora?

As mechanics have shop-talk and pilots have hangar-talk, so fans have fan-gabs (in clubs and via correspondence) where one is likely to be discussing authors and stories one moment and probable Sci-type stars in the Earth-type planets, the next. The present topic of interest seems generally to be how science-fiction can be improved so its boom of popularity won't do a sudden reverse.

But the more cooks who join in, of course, the bigger the head on the broth! Seems I just vaguely recall meeting one Lemuel Mutton at last July's New York Stf Conference, who said there was a slight bulging of the walls of the mail dept. down at 10 East 40th, due to some lamebrained fan's brash essay. I am now sewing buttons back on my shirt. But may those walls continue to bulge, chum!

Yep. All in all, it's as satisfying a hobby as can be. Has its surprises too, I must say. So you write a story about a farmer who becomes a senator, now, someplace, that's gonna hit a farmer who'd like to be a senator—did I say that right? Yeah. Okay, so somebody's gonna get a kick out of the yarn.

So a girl wondered why the dark races weren't represented in stf—for about the same reason, it seemed to me. I grew up in New Mexico, where the population's about 80% Spanish Americans, which was muy bueno with me, and a couple of my finest school-chums were colored boys—you can imagine what a surprise Dorothy Brown-Nalls' letter was! But—well, enough of this.

And with Mac and Ollie and Canuck and

the rest of the gang, I shall happily wend my way through the winding streets of some quaint village, rattling the chimney-pots with lusty song. And pausing, perhaps, to gaze with sadness at any glare of fire or sputtering of guns on the far horizon. Indeed, no battle-grounds, please. The way things look we may get into that soon enough and it won't be figurative. So speaks this Jerque from Old Albuquerque.—24 Kensington Ave., Jersey City 6, N. J.

We love your letter, Joe—and don't get us wrong. It has spirit, emotional appeal, nostalgia of sorts, camaraderie, chutney, sex-appeal and a dash of basil. But what in hell does it mean? Please write us again by way of explanation.

FUTUREFOLK by Nancy Moore

Dear Editor: Since you were nice enough to print my last letter I have decided to honor you with another (lucky, lucky, you). First I think I can help brother Austin on the story he's trying to find. In the Fall, '41 issue of Planet Stories—I suppose I'll be censored here—there was a lead novel by Eando Binder called "Vassals of the Master World," wherein Earth is enslaved by a planet called Tharkya. All the inhabited planets of our galaxy were likewise enslaved and forced to deliver one gram of energon to Tharkya yearly as tribute. Hero falls in love with a Venusian girl, I think, and they live happily ever after. Could be this is the story you're trying to find, Buz?

On to the latest Startling, "Pardon my Iron Nerves" was very good. As it has been said before, Captain Future belongs to a different era in sciencefiction. The old CF stories were good and well received when they were published but the dyed-in-the-wool STFfan is looking for a little more than that 'an Munder in his reading. So I suggest you keep the current series of CF stories well sprinkled with humor. They're better that way.

"Tall Tale" seems to me the sort of story that might find its way into an anthology in a year or so. Incidentally, I met Mack Reynolds at the Norwescon. He's a pretty swell guy and takes his writing very seriously. Let's have more of his work.

Rog Phillips has done much better than "Love My Robot" and how this ever got into SS I'll never know. Rog will probably pin my ears back for this when he sees me again but—LMR WAS THE WORST STORY IN THE ISSUE!! There! I've said it and I'm glad! Glad, do you hear. . . . ?

Now to a subject currently under discussion—we fan seem to enjoy thinking of ourselves as a group of "future people," i. e. mentally superior in more ways than one. Still, there seem to be some of us who will look down our noses at someone whose skin is a different color.

S-I authors often discuss tolerance toward extra-terrestrial races. Can we even hope to stay on friendly terms with Martians or Venusians when there are those among us who condemn the other fellow because of a different shade of epidermis?

We're not even ready for something like space travel when we still have with us something as downright stupid as racial intolerance. I think that expresses my personal views.

I'll close this with a limerick. Let's hear you answer this one, Ed.—

I dislike Bergey's women, they bulge
In places unflattering to them
They curve where they shouldn't
And bend where they couldn't
And should get the waste-basket due them.

Okay but how come your first and second lines don't bulge—I mean rhyme? To put the limerick in your own (i.e. the N. Moore or no-more form sans bulges) form we would have to do this—

*The places where Bergey's babes swell
Are those that cause strong men to
skiffle
Their sub-breastplate bumps
Are sure cures for male dumps
And bring us in many an epistle.*

Whereas and however, not to mention nonetheless, your true limerick should run as follows—

*The places where Bergey's babes swell
Bring from every true male a loud yell
Their curves callipiduous
Are so prestigious
They tell the world why Adam fell.*

At any rate, perhaps you have the idea by this time. If you don't you probably never will.

FROM ALL ANGLES by Captain Kenneth F. Slater

Dear Un-nameable: Nov. 55 turned up a few days ago, beauteous near-nude on cover, as always. I know it is not your fault, but I do wish something could be done about those covers. For my money, they are the only thing that prevent the SS/TWS twins from heading the field for all-round excellence. Among the good, bad and indifferent s-f and fantasy mags which are flooding into the market in steadily increasing numbers there are one or two that outshine yours in some specific way, but none which can be relied upon to give such good stuff from the "all angles" point of view.

Jack Vance's FIVE GOLD BANDS was good but not quite up to par. The plot seemed to be somewhat forced and the action strung out too much. Best two tales (in my opinion only) were the Hubbard novelet and the Phillips short. The humor in Ed Hamilton's tale rather spoiled it. Shame, cos it had to be funny, didn't it? There will be unsmitten folk disagree with me, of course. Actually, I'd almost been converted to liking Captain Future and crew. Now I am right back hating their intestines.

TALL TALE, Mack Reynolds, was more amusing, from the "fighter" side, than the

Future item. William's ROAD BLOCK was good, tho theme is not new, he gave it rather special treatment. I liked—if it could have been longer (it couldn't very well have been) I'd have rated it above Rog Phillips' yarn.

'Fraid there is not much news from this side of the water, but one item to note is that NOVA PUBS have put out the second string—Walt Gillings' mutated SCIENCE-FANTASY. I'm sending you a copy . . . and you'll note it is not as good as we'd hoped it would be.

This new scheme of fanzine reviewing is not so good. At least, you previously prevented a complete waste of money by fans, & gave them some idea of what they'd get for their sub. I rather think that from here-on inclusion in Part II of your listing will mean no subs—but that is the fanzine-editors' own fault, I guess.

I can't follow the reasoning behind some of their complaints. . . do any of them honestly expect to make a profit on publishing a fanzine? Excluding such items as FANTASY ADVERTISER, naturally. And why they should take exception to a few well-intended lists that they were below average gets me. Fandom must be growing up with thin skins these days.

It is not so long back that folk were being positively and absolutely rude to each other. Anyway, what real harm does it do to say something is not worth buying—not that I can recall you being quite that outspoken. It tells the editor that he has got to buck his ideas up and it warns other fans from laying out the hard-earned buck for 10 copies of something you can not even see for wrapping paper.

Back in Sept. '49 you told me that OPERATION FANTAST needed its hair brushed. Did I write back and complain that you were stopping folk subscribing? No, I took a metaphorical brush and comb to the 'zine and cleaned it up! I may have cursed you under my breath at the time but I took the hint.—15 Gp. R.P.C., B. A.O.R., 22, c/o GPO, England.

Something has been done about our covers as you doubtless know by this time. Hope you approve the changes. Sex is definitely not out but we intend to make it a bit more palatable when employed and to use other variations and ideas when, as and if we can.

Actually, the new fanzine review system is far sounder than the old. Outside of the standouts we could give the bulk of them little more than a cursory glance-through. So our comment was hardly reliable for a shopper's guide. Now we have a chance to study completely the best-appearing jobs without cluttering ourselves up with the others—yet at the same time we give them a listing.

Seems to me the tee-list should be at least as worth while shooting for as the old A and B business.

We saw one of the Gillings books and

liked immensely, Ken. Hope your gang over there gets out of its technical doldrums soon. Certainly Britain is teeming with loyal and alert fans—one should be productive and would be if they could. We hope they get the chance.

BABY SITTER ISSUE by Anna Lee McLeod

Dear Editor: Starting off this epistle with a smile, I must congratulate you for putting out one issue (the November one) which is greatly suited to all feminine fans who are mothers of demanding one-year-olds. When my darling daughter was asleep, I was able to get in a half-hour or so at a time of reading on the short stories. I think your selection was most excellent this time also. "The Old Man" had such a grand surprise ending; and I liked the one about the prospector who saw the rocket-ship. In fact they all were good.

But now comes a gripe. I wish that you-all would give this forlorn Californian a chance to be happy. I would like to know just how to get letters from other stf fans. And what does a person have to have to get into TEV for good, like the Colos and Ed Cox, etc.???

Living in Maryland is like being on the Moon—plenty dead. I would like to know where to find a Science Fiction Society to join, even by mail. S.O.S.—I'm lonely. See what you can do, Nonny-moose. Please.—Apartment 2, 212 South Union Ave., Havre-de-Grace, Maryland.

Shuck, ma'am, yo-all cain't be lonely down there in the heart of the Tannenbaum country. Not while warm hearts and Southern chivalry still flourish. Ask any Northern racetrack reporter following a Preakness weekend. Seriously, Maryland and the Moon have little in common. Take over, Maryland. As for getting into TEV "for good" as you put it, just keep writing interesting letters.

Incidentally the "prospector" who saw the space-ship in the Mack Reynolds story TALL TALE was a very real and fabulous figure in the countryclubification of the pre-Civil War West. It was Jim Bridger who first discovered Yellowstone for the white man. And his stories of Old Faithful and the like were considered riotously "tall tales" by his hard-bitten comrades—until later confirmed. We don't know whether or not he actually did see the space or rather time-ship, however. As the story points out he lacked the nerve to tell that one.

WITH FOOT IN MOUTH by Earl Newlin, Jr.

Dear Ed: I knew you were talented but I didn't know you were a contortionist. However, you neatly stuck your foot in your mouth in this Starling November issue. You tell us the robot-versus-man story is threadbare and in the same ish you run out one but two robotales.

Of course, you don't find me complaining about this. I'm a sucker for robots. I could become quite fond of a cute little metal monster, but this is merely because I'm a psychiatric pervert. There are a lot of us perverts around, who have emotional feeling for things much less animate than a robot. Things like old shoes, speed-boats, pocket knives. . . .

Anyway, "Love My Robot" was a good tale. Also the appearance of Reg Phillips (Yah, yah, I know his name's Graham. But it gripes me to see characters refer to a penname'd author by his true name. It gets confusing, and it's the same as saying "Hey look at me. I know his real name, so I am an experienced fan.") was welcome.

I liked the other robotism, too. Say Ed, I have a brilliant idea. Next time I make a robot, I'll put some revolving top-sided wheels in his head. Then he would have a distinct personality. He'd be *erotic*.

I won't bore you by rating the rest of the stories (because I haven't read them yet) but I will comment upon the cover. Some Bergey fans will like it, shouting "We want flesh. Large feminine expanse of soft pink flesh!!"

Maybe you could talk Bergey into doing an abstract cover. Ah, I can picture it now. Beautiful scantily-clad circle being protected by handsome dashing square. And looming in the background we find a hideous writhing, bng-eyed-rectangle!!! Cute, huh?

I wish I'd have been around when all that Sarge Saturn business was going on. . . . Why, we new fan don't even know what it was all about! Could you give us a sample? Just one, painless paragraph? Aw, come on.

I'm glad there are gals in fandom. BUT . . . first we must assume that they are intelligent, as Shelby Vick did. Now, if a dame is intelligent enough to like the same type of fiction a lot of the males do (ahem . . .), then they are most probably un-beautiful. Most of the average female reading is of the "Intimate Passion" mags.

Therefore and wherefore, not to mention to wit, whereas, we could assume that they had an average mentality that was a little—warped. Most of the beauties I know aren't interested in anything but male animals. Tak!

I don't see who started the rumor that an stfan had to be intelligent, anyway. A lot of swill in other mags (and sometimes in yours) is pure adventure, with very little emphasis on unusual concepts. How about a lead novel of 75 pages of mathematical formulae? (If you ever need any more original ideas, I'll help you out next month in TWS.)—107 Peck Avenue, San Antonio 10, Texas!!!

Help us out and under the fore-jets of some ambulating Mercurian meat wagon, you spawn of the outer satellites. Fah! Bring on the xeno, Frogeyes, this diluted half-measure of Phatenian dishwasher is more than we can bear. Had enough, Earl? We have—in fact we had it years and years ago when we interred the Sarge and his gruesome pets in a fur-lined hoghead of Arcturean brandy, double-distilled.

You seem to belong in the "square" cate-

gory yourself, kid. Or, worse, among the flats—which, according to Eddy Condon, are squares lying down.

BOUQUETS FOR ROG

by Janie Lamb

Dear Ed: You did it. You did it, and here's a big beautiful bouquet for you. But how in the world did you manage it? Blackmail or bribery? I'll bet you offered the poor starving guy money. Of course I'm talking of your adding Rog Phillips to your list of writers. Nice work!

Hamilton outdid himself on this Captain Future yarn. I like a taste of humor in my stories. *Parson My Iron Nerves* had it. Vance was way below par. Better feed him some cream of wheat.

I always turn to the reader's corner firstest, but this time, *whew!* I begin to think the dear ole Ed had spilled some fried garlic in the letter section (he eats it for lunch, it's a secret though) but when I finally located the odor, 'twas only Sigler's letter.

And now, Ed, a hearty AMEN to your promise of no me' letters on the racial question in SS. There's no place for it in stf circles (squares either). Some seem to think racial prejudice is the seed of slavery. 'Tain't so, 'cause look at the trouble Moses had with his family, because he loved and married a colored girl. And as wise as Solomon was he lamented the fact his skin was black. Had there not been racial prejudice then, would he have cared if he was black or white? The Negro would have been far happier and progressed farther if they had been given a reservation like the Indians, but let's keep this feud out of fandom, regardless of what any of us think, or want, racial prejudice is here to stay.—*Helskell, Tennessee.*

Solomon black? Old Man Muse in love with a Lydian lady? Reservations for Negroes and not on the Superchief? You've got us in a spin, Janie, no foolin'. And just when we thought that one was all wrapped up for the dustbin. Ah, well! Write us again anyway although your logic eludes us completely. It has a sort of eerie charm—yours and Gibson's. Confidentially we used neither blackmail nor bribery on Roger P. A pres-gang did the job for us with dispatch.

POSITION UNTENABLE

by Bill Venable

Dear Ed:

You nasty man, you! Lately I have had a sort of antipathy towards SS and TWS. In fact, when I saw the latest ish of SS reposing on my local newsstand, I gave a great cry of jubilation. I will now, figures I, read this over and then sit down and write a suitable letter of condemnation to the editor. 'Twould indeed have been a fitting pastime, as I was severely suffering from GAFIA (Get-Away-From-It-
[Turn page]



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Ally, and desired to indulge my sadistic impulses to the full.

But no. No! No! You had to go and fill the November ish with the best damn stories I have read in a long time in any magazine. My day was ruined. Damn it, they were good! I suffered interminably that day. I sat down and enjoyed THE FIVE GOLD BANDS so much that I CRIED out in frustration. How could I pan such a story as that? There was no way. It was good.

I am accustomed to the fact that Vance's MAGNUS RIDOLPH series is terrific. Still, I could hope that there would be no MR story in that ish. Indeed, when I saw that Vance had been trying another type of story, I felt jubilant. Here, says I, was where he had gone too far. Out of his element I figured his staff would be horrible. But was it? Oh, no! You had to publish a good lead novel this time.

But that wasn't enough for you. Even the novelets were terrific. PARDON MY IRON NERVES in the hottest thing that has hit Ed Hamilton since the beginning of the Future-men. And having it written in the first person by a ro—excuse me, I mean Grag, was indeed novel. Has that ever been done before? And then there was TOUGH OLD MAN. Now, I know Hubbard is a clear, and therefore what could I expect but a good story? And it was—it was. Your coup is complete.

To add insult to injury, even the short stories were tops. Who could possibly condemn Rog Phillips, anyway? And how could anyone pan LOVE MY ROBOT? It was science-fiction in the best style. TALL TALE also rates this category. Every bit of it was anthology material.

I have one redeemer. ROAD BLOCK. Now the writing was O.K. but the story wasn't finished. For some reason I like to have a final or semifinal conclusion to a story. ROAD BLOCK was one of those types that describes something with great possibilities and then finishes, leaving the reader up in the air.

But the mag as a whole—I mean the contents—was wonderful. You couldn't have done better on a bet.—*St Park Place, R. D. No. 4, Pittsburgh 2, Pennsylvania.*

Go ahead and be as sadistic as you wish, Bill. We dot on it, simply dot on it! And ROAD BLOCK was so finished!

SIEW OR SIUE

by J. E. Clarke

Dear Sir: I have never written a fan letter to any magazine. I have read every number of this mag since it started publication. I read science fiction for the enjoyment I get from it. I think that it is only fair that I express my appreciation for the many happy hours that the perusal of this publication has given me. The stories are all good, only some are better than others.

I have just finished reading the Nov. 1950 number. The stories are improving right along. I can't find the name of the Editor any place in this mag. I think that I know the reason for that—he probably has only a number. I deduce this from the fact that on page 153 he says "Ugh! Praise Allah we were never a child!"

Could it be that he is a Robot, conditioned and trained to be a science fiction editor? That would tend to explain the increasing excellence of his material. If I am right in this matter there are a whole slew of questions that I'd like to ask!

I especially like L. Ron Hubbard's stories. I think that he showed remarkable restraint in not mentioning Dianetics in this last story. I believe that L. Sprague de Camp disagrees with Ron on that subject! I haven't read a had "Captain Future" story yet.

The inside art work agrees favorably with the general makeup of the magazine and the cover picture is good, but I can't help worrying whether that little string will continue to hold up that dinky apron! Nobody else is printing any better stories than STARTLING and I read about half a dozen others and should know. I'm 68 years old and am probably your oldest reader.

I started reading the letters in the present issue using a pair of magnifying spectacles. Then after a while I started using a large reading glass but even that didn't help for long. Some of the letters are interesting. I feel that the discussion of racial differences should have no place in these letters. Given equal educational and training opportunities, ALL of them are about equal in brain power.—*511 1/2 Lighthouse Ave., Pacific Grove, California.*

Robotic editors, yet—brrrrr! At that, it might come in handy to have one or more around, scuttling out to interview fans and so on. More seriously, Mr. Clarke, your letter gives us a desire to know just who our oldest reader is. How about it, all of you? Will you send in your nominations? We'd be glad to publish an occasional photograph if it is clear enough for screen reproduction. With which we hereby inaugurate an oldest SS fan contest.

1950—THE SUMMING UP

by Robert P. Hoskins

Dear Muttonhead: The date: August thirty-first, the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and fifty. The above mentioned year is two-thirds gone. Or so one would think. But wait! What is this?

The latest issue of STARTLING appeared two days ago and is dated November, which means that the year has vanished before our eyes. There will be no more issues of dear old SS dated this year. So the time has come, the walrus said, to speak of many things. Of the best of novels, novelets and author queens and kings. Oh, well, it rhymes.

Appropriately enough we shall start out by listing the six novels in their proper place, according to my own insignificant personal opinions.

L. WINE OF THE DREAMERS by John D. MacDonald. I think you mentioned sometime back that there might be a slim chance of its being made into a movie. That'd be one of the best things to hit the silver screen since talkies and color!

II. THE LADY IS A WITCH by Norman A. Daniels. Some fan didn't like it. Fle on them! Another good bet for the movies.

III. THE CITY AT WORLD'S END by Old World-Wrecker himself. As in my letter in the current SS, I say: A SEQUEL! A dozen of them.

IV. THE FIVE GOOD BANDS by Jack Vance. I'm still reading it but I can already tell I'm gonna love it. More of the same in novel-length from Vance!

V. THE CYBERNETIC BRAINS by Raymond F. Jones. Superb bit of writing. By the way, are we gonna see some more stuff about Cal Meacham? -

VI. THE SHADOW MEN by A. E. van Vogt. At the beginning of the season I was gonna rate it best. But you surprised me by coming out with more and more super-superb stuff.

That little chore be through. Next we find the novelets. Will only rank what I considered to be the top three as there are too many of them. Will do the same with the shorts. A pause, while I go over the list of them again.

I. ROMAN HOLIDAY by Kelvin Kent. Tops on my list of novelets. Am thinking of making a list of my favorites in each classification. RH would be about third in several hundred.

II. PARDON MY IRON NERVES by Edmond Hamilton. I read the Hubbard nvt in the latest ish before this one and I thot that that had hit the peak of egotism in a character, (Constable Moffat.) But I read Grag's own story next. Believe me, I didn't even try to conceal my emotions! My sides still ache.

III. CHILDREN OF THE SUN by Edmond Hamilton. This was tough but Captain Future scored again! Hamilton and his hand have taken two out of three in 1950! I hope they can do it again. All I can say is all power to them.

And last, but not least, we are down to the shorts. This is gonna be the toughest job of all. Wait! I'm forgetting the artwork. And I thot I was gonna have a rest soon. But on with it.

I. STARS OVER SANTA CLAUS by William Morrison. Cute little tale. Samnason is tops when it comes to shorts. Dunno why I did it but I have chosen him for first and third spots. Again one author stealing from his pals.

II. DOWN THE RIVER by Mack Reynolds. In a way it carries a good message. Too bad everyone can't be forced to read it. And I mean everyone! Illiterate persons could have it read to them. Teach this old world to mind its P's and Q's.

III. DISAPPOINTMENT by William Morrison. I see again that several fem didn't like it. Any of you boys wanna fight? Good. You'd make good sparring partners for some pugilist.

[Turn page]

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Best cover of the year: March issue, I won't try to rate the other artwork. Finlay and Orban are in good form. I see that Orban dominates the November issue.

I didn't get down to see you, Lemmy, for which you should be very grateful. But someday I'm gonna make a special trip just to see what your ugly puss is like. I hear you're the average American man everyone talks about when describing someone. Didn't even know that such a critter actually exists.

A few last minute notes: You have published a total of thirty-nine stories in SS in the past year. Contrary to one fan's opinion in a recent ish of Tucker's SF NEWS LETTER, the quality of your material is not going down, but coming up.

I think Vernon McCain has a good idea in his letter. I know I thought about entering fandom for at least two years before I finally did. And the only reason I finally did was because I was in an extra-ambitious mood one evening with nothing to do. You now know what I chose to do to pass the time. Don't you sometimes wish that you had never been born? Or better yet, that no fan had ever been born?—Lyons Falls, New York.

Now that it's over we can't say that we do. Although there were moments in the course of preparing the above peristyle. . . . But enough said. It's all more or less in fun or at least in controversy. Once again, you all seem to have come up and in with plenty on the proverbial spheroid this time. Here's hoping it's hotter yet come May. You might hop over to THE READER SPEAKS IN THRILLING WONDER STORIES next month to see how things are on that sfront.

—THE EDITOR.



**REVIEW OF THE
CURRENT
SCIENCE
FICTION
FAN PUBLICATIONS**

WELL, it had to happen apparently—thanks to our limiting our list of fanzine reviews to an arbitrary ten. The-cabbage has overflowed the pot. To maintain our "top-ten" listing we are going to have to give a number of deserving fan publi-



cations special treatment in front. So here goes—

Arthur C. Clarke, B. Sc., scarcely an X-factor to any of you, has sent us along the most recent copy of the erudite *Journal of the British Interplanetary Society*, which is led off by the printed version of a speech delivered in London before the society by Mr. Clarke himself. Its title is *Space-Travel in Fact and Fiction* and apparently the fact that it was originally delivered on April first, last, has no bearing upon its remorseless peerings into stf primitives.

Also included, among other articles and reviews, are a study of *Space Rocket Trajectories* by Dr. Samuel Herrick and an A. V. Cleaver review of Hollywood's *Destination Moon*.

Other arrivals from the "perfidious Albino" include *Wonder Magazine*, Vol. 2 No. 2, published by Michael Tealby at 8 Bursfield Avenue, Loughborough, Leicestershire, England, containing some amusingly anglicized fanfiction and the Captain Kenneth F. Slater perennial, *OPERATION FANTASY*, un-

[Turn page]

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loosed quarterly upon an unsuspecting
world from 13 G.P. R.P.C., B.A.O.R., 23,
c/o G.P.O. England, at 15c per copy, 6 issues
75c, post free. As usual it is lively, thought-
ful and packed with stf gossip from both
sides of the Atlantic.

As for American 'zines, we are giving
special attention to the second issue of
INCINERATIONS, a mad, mad and in
several spots very funny job produced quar-
terly by the Grape Press, 9109 SW Oleson
Road, Portland 19, Oregon at 10c per copy
and 10 issues \$1.00. The letter retorts in the
finale and the cartoon on reinforcement of
an engram are alone worth a lot more than a
dime to us.

The Nameless Ones

Then a fan-group from 3200 Harvard N.,
Seattle 2, Washington, which has hovered
on the fan-fringes for some time under the
title of *The Nameless Ones*, has burst into
something of a frenzy of activity with a
good fanzine entitled somewhat forbiddingly
SINISTERRA, in which William N. Austin,
Gordon Springer, Burnett R. Toskey,
Wally Weber, Lin Carter and a slew of
others cut loose with stories, features,
poems and artwork of generally high fan-
caliber at two hits per.

As if this were not enough the same
group, headed by William N. Austin, has
come up with a 15c SCIENCE FANTASY
REPORT CARD, just about as elaborate
and informative a polling of fan and prodom
as science fiction has yet seen. Well worth
the modest fee.

And Leonard Moffatt of Lilliputian Press,
Garden Grove, California, has produced a
very neat and professional FAN DI-
RECTORY for 1950 members of the Fan-
tasy Foundation and the National Fantasy
Federation (NFFF), which should be of
interest to members and others.

Quite a lot of special stuff, what? And
now let's look at the lucky ten and lists
of the not-so-lucky that will follow.

Here Are the Ten

ETAOIN SHRDLU, Apt. 2F, 40 West 77th Street, New
York 24, New York. Editor, Stephens Tallen. Published
quarterly, 10c per copy, 3 issues 25c.

This veteran *Eitler* has taken a remarkable turn for the
better in its Fall, 1950, issue, even including an amusing and
thought-provoking article on iff cliches by none other than
Henry Kuttner (with we could get him back to writing for
us) and the inevitable study of dionetics, this time by Mer-
ton Steinhilber.

THE FANSCIENT, 3435 NE 38th Avenue, Portland 13,

Oregon, Editor, Donald B. Day. Published quarterly. 25c per copy, 6 issues \$1.00.

Recent Norwegian activities seem to have slowed up recent publication of this smallest and best of fancies. The issue at hand, however, though tardy, is up to snuff, containing contributions by de la Courcy, Forrest J. Ackerman, Anthony Soucher, E. Everett Eslyn, Thomas H. Carter and others, to say nothing of the inevitable high-quality short-work on which Mr. Day seems to have something of a current monopoly.

FANTASY TIMES, 137-05 32nd Avenue, Flushing, New York. Editor, James V. Taurasi. Published twice monthly. 10c per copy, 12 issues \$1.00.

Still probably far and away the best and most interesting of fanzines ever printed, it continues more up-to-the-minute material from more sources (sci-fi, too, as a rule) than anything else around. We don't pretend to know how they do it but it's damned good reporting.

MEZRAR, P.O. Box No. 431, Tehoka, Texas. Editors, Marion Z. and Robert Broday. Published quarterly. Free on request.

A thoughtful and maybe enlightening article on ORIGIN OF THE UNIVERSE by Bernard Kosztel is the big item in this issue, with E. Russell Tensing of remorselessly on both Newton and Einstein. We admire his rascally sense. Bill Fennel, Genevieve K. Stephens and others are also on hand—although Marion Z. Broday is missing his fine outlook. But a good one none the less.

THE NEKROMANTIKON, 1905 Spruce Avenue, Kansas City 1, Missouri. Editor, Manly Benitzer. Published quarterly. 25c per copy, 4 issues \$1.00.

A long roverlet of fine travel, TWILIGHT FELL AT CAMELOT by M. Houston, occupies most of the Fall issue, shared only by a brief editorial, an article on fantasy poetess LITH Lorraine and a bit of whimsy by D. R. Smith on a mad Arab. This Houston job, while not quite up to professional standards, is somewhat better than fiction and the Ralph Eybout Phillips is surely effective. This is just about the outstanding newcomer of 1950.

ODD MAGAZINE, 1302 Lester Street, Poplar Bluff, Missouri. Editor, Duggie Fisher. Published bi-monthly. 15c per copy, 2 issues 25c, 10 issues \$1.00.

Jon Arlstrom's cover is certainly ODD enough even for this one—so much so that its symbolism eludes us utterly—but we liked it for all that. A couple of fair pieces of fiction by Eugene DeWesse and Johnny McKeenan and Richard Elsbury's department nudges this one just into the roster of the elite.

RHODOMAGNETIC DIGEST, 2524 Telegraph Avenue, Berkeley 4, California. Editor, Donald Baker Moore. Published monthly. 25c per copy.

Still a West Coast powerhouse, with David B. Keblek coming up this issue with an outstanding article ON COMMUNICATION WITH EXTRA-TERRESTRIALS and such well qualified experts as hand as Gladys Fabun, Editor Moore, Norman Springer, George Blumstein, George Frisquet and others to see off on such weird topics as ROCKETSHIP XM and just about all pro and fanzines. Good stuff.

SCIENCE FICTION NEWS LETTER, P. O. Box #260, Bloomington, Illinois. Editor, Bob Tucker. Published bi-monthly. 10c per copy.

Note price reductions in this well-conceived and acid-tipped information 'zine, which is of at least as much interest to pros as to fans. Book and magazine reviews, fan-gossip and news of pro publishers, editors of all are first rate. Endorsement of price from two bits to a dime noted and approved.

SPACEWARP, 1057 S. Normandie Avenue, Los Angeles 6, California. Editor, Charles Barben. Published monthly. 25c per copy.

This seems to be a new and improved deal all around for another B-list perennial, with Joe Kennedy taking the lead via a rip-roaring memoir of some of his fanactivities of recent years. F. J. Laney, Jack Speer, Walter Caplet, G. Gordon Dewey, Stu Melchiorre, Rick Sneyer, Reid Suggs and Willie Cozner

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SCIENCE FICTION BOOKSHELF

REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

1984 by George Orwell, Signet Books, New York (25c).

To us by far the most important single appearance of the most prolific month to date in sfantasy publishing is the appearance of the late George Orwell's great novel in 25c form. Since this terrifying and magnificent conception of the blind alley into which current trends, social, military and



political may lead us—some say are leading us—has already been reviewed to a crisp dark brown, we shall here give it no more than an enthusiastic re-indorsement.

Suffice it to say that those who don't seize upon this opportunity to read or reread the appalling tragedy of Winston Smith, Julia and O'Brien under the aegis of the all-pervasive Big Brother should have their heads and emotions examined. One of the great books of our time—and one of the few great books of all time with definite sf interest.

THE MAN WHO SOLD THE MOON by Robert A. Heinlein, Shasta Publishers, Chicago (\$3.00).

An extraordinarily interesting volume, composed of a half dozen of Mr. Heinlein's famed "future history" series (its inaugural studies), which depict with enormous conviction the progress of man from his disordered present into a future which, though still plenty disorderly, manages to take him ultimately to the stars after a number of false starts and failures.

A number of the stories included, particularly *The Roads Must Roll*, have been previously anthologized but their author

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is one whose best work (and this is his best work) stands up beautifully under the acid test of rereading. But to us a previously unseen effort, the short novel from which the title is derived, is the standout.

Delos D. Harriman, the man who manages to get first others and then finally—and almost too late—himself to Earth's atellite, is a fascinating character, combining candor and the unceasing urge to follow a dream to its end with humor and a professional deviousness that Machiavelli might have envied.

He gets to the Moon—yes. But in order to do so he has to involve himself and his hard-shelled colleagues in a series of promotional pyramids that are reminiscent, if far more skilful, than those indulged in by the late Samuel Insull. The story is remarkable not only for its human appeal but for the ingenious and loving care lavished on the mechanics of quasi-legal big-business.

A fine adult job all the way.

THE HOUSE THAT STOOD STILL by A. E. van Vogt, Greenberg, Publisher, New York (\$2.50).

This is an odd piece of fantasy—which manages to straddle the two poles of mystery and science fiction. It deals with an ancient mansion on a California hilltop which was standing there long before the Conquistadores appeared from the south to take over its occupation and concomitant rule of the surrounding countryside.

It has remained in the Americanized hands of descendants of the Spanish occupiers and is run through an agent, Allison Stephens, an ex-Marine, who soon finds himself up to his neck in bodies (quick and dead), ancient mysteries, cabals of the present and one Mistra Lanett, a sort of eternal woman (apologies to Mrs. D. D. Sharp).

What it is all about remains obscure to Stephens and in large part to the reader until, at the story's end, the true nature of the ancient house is unveiled. This is a tour de force, packed with unsuspected surprises we have no intention of revealing here. If the story has a tendency to fall at times between its mystery and science fiction antipodes—well, for the most part it holds interest if not a great deal of sense.

THE DREAMING JEWELS by Theodore Sturgeon, Greenberg, Publisher, New York (\$2.50).

A fascinating and very unusual story as Mr. Sturgeon tells us of young Horty Bluett, the boy who seems to those who know him

to have antester blood. Horty knew he was "different," of course—but was not aware of the extent of his variance from the human norm until he lost, horribly, three fingers from one of his hands.

The fingers grew back by themselves and Horty began to get the idea. From then on he went in search of his fate, a fate inextricably involved with the alien jewels that were not jewels at all, with number of strange men and women in a number of strange environments, including a traveling freak show.

Mr. Sturgeon has built his story upon a solid interweaving of conflicts and characters that cause it to build almost unbearably to a climax which, in suspense and vivid bizarreness reminds one inescapably of something Alfred Hitchcock might have tackled via the movies but has not yet so done. A swell story.

CONAN THE CONQUEROR by Robert E. Howard, Gnome Press, New York (\$2.75).

This is a neo-Arthurian saga of the colorful derring-dos of an age of magic and chivalry existing in some phantom era before the continents of Earth divided up to form the present land-masses. Conan, its principal figure, is a prime adventurer who has won himself a kingdom and must regain it after being dethroned by rival rulers with the aid of an evil sorcerer brought back from the dead by a miraculous precious stone.

He does so hut only after a series of hair-raising episodes, which see him roving much of the globe, first to learn of the stone, then to recover it, then to use it against his betrayers. There is considerable lusty humor to lighten the heavy load of super-hoarding and a fine inside-cover map by David Kyle to make the weird geography understandable. Swell stuff for a rainy night.

THE GREEN MAN OF GRAYPEC by Festus Pragnell, Greenberg, Publisher, New York (\$2.50).

We have often wondered what happens to former tennis champions when they vanish from the limelight. Mr. Pragnell here tells us of what happened to one of them at any rate, Learoy Spofford, when he paid a visit to his scientist brother and gets inducted thereby into the world of the atom.

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THE WORD OF A by A. E. van Vogt, the epic of neo-Aristotelianism (A—or null-A) and general semantics which narrates the amazingly ubiquitous saga of Gilbert Gosevyn (a sort of one-man trio) in an anarchic Solar System that is far from ideal despite vast future advances.

FURY by Henry Kuttner, a fine alien fantasy of the problems of Immortal Sam Reed amid the undersea citadels of Venus in a day when Earth has been for ages an atomized dust-pile.

THE ISLAND OF CAPTAIN SPARROW by S. Fowler Wright, in which a doomed-to-death-by-disease Englishman, Charlton Foyle, finds refuge on an uncharted Pacific island inhabited not only by savage descendants of 19th-century pirates and a beautiful French refugee but by Satyrs and the remaining scions of a race of ancients from whom came the Greeks.

THE HUMANOIDS by Jack Williamson, rather frightening tale of galactic future-culture in which mankind has all sorts of trouble with robots and needs a flock of psi qualities to even the score to say nothing of the social structure.

All in all the most memorable month in our several years as a science fiction and fantasy book reviewer. We hope it is but a forerunner of what lies ahead.

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Mr. Pratt, whose writings in recent years, when non-factual, have been directed more toward fantasy than science fiction proper, has here attacked a pure pseudo-scientific problem based on modern laboratory reality, has followed it through to a conclusion so unexpected, so vast and so inescapably terrifying that it is going to disturb a lot of well-earned rest and spoil a goodly number of bucolic outings this summer.

Along with this arresting theme Mr. Pratt has come up with some of the most clear-cut and completely human characters that we have had the pleasure of meeting in manuscript for too many moons. Slater and Angelus, Wright and Belle and Yumping Yiminy and the baffled Inez are going to be people you know very well indeed—and not all of them are going to be your friends.

Atomic Space-Writing

To balance a thoroughly unusual novel we have come up with an equally unusual long novelet, **LETTERS OF FIRE** by Matt Lee. This is a story of a near future that finds Earth, fed to the teeth with the privations of ideological conflict, interested not only in security but in entertainment—with

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This series, which has appeared regularly in SS during that past year and a quarter, has brought back to modern stf a maturer Captain Future whose ultimate publication in book form should be more or less inevitable. But Mr. Hamilton would prefer to tackle other characters and other themes and we have no intention of saying him nay.

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